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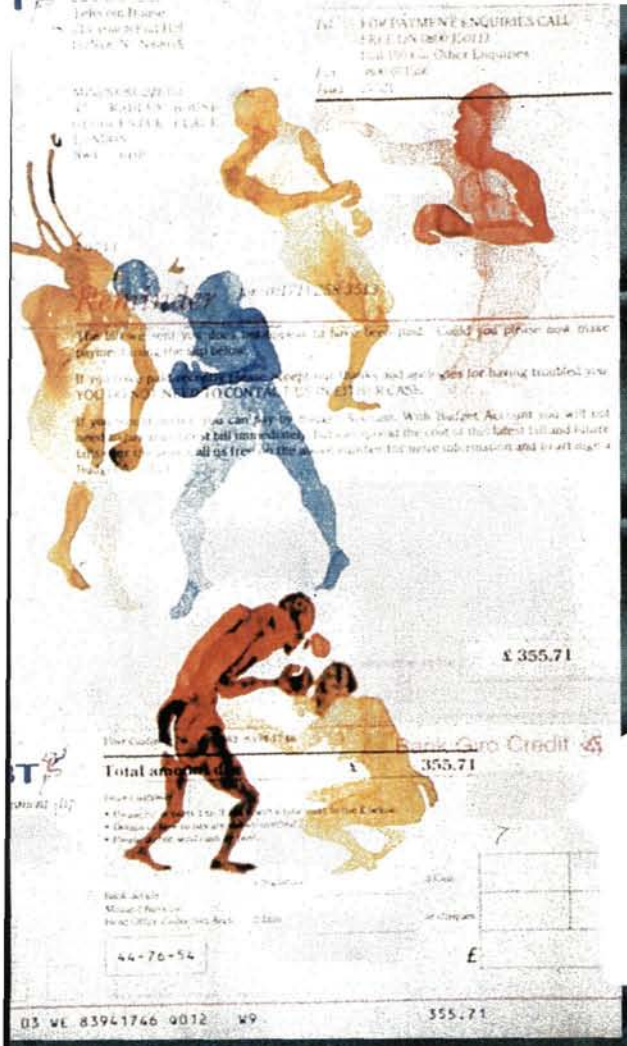

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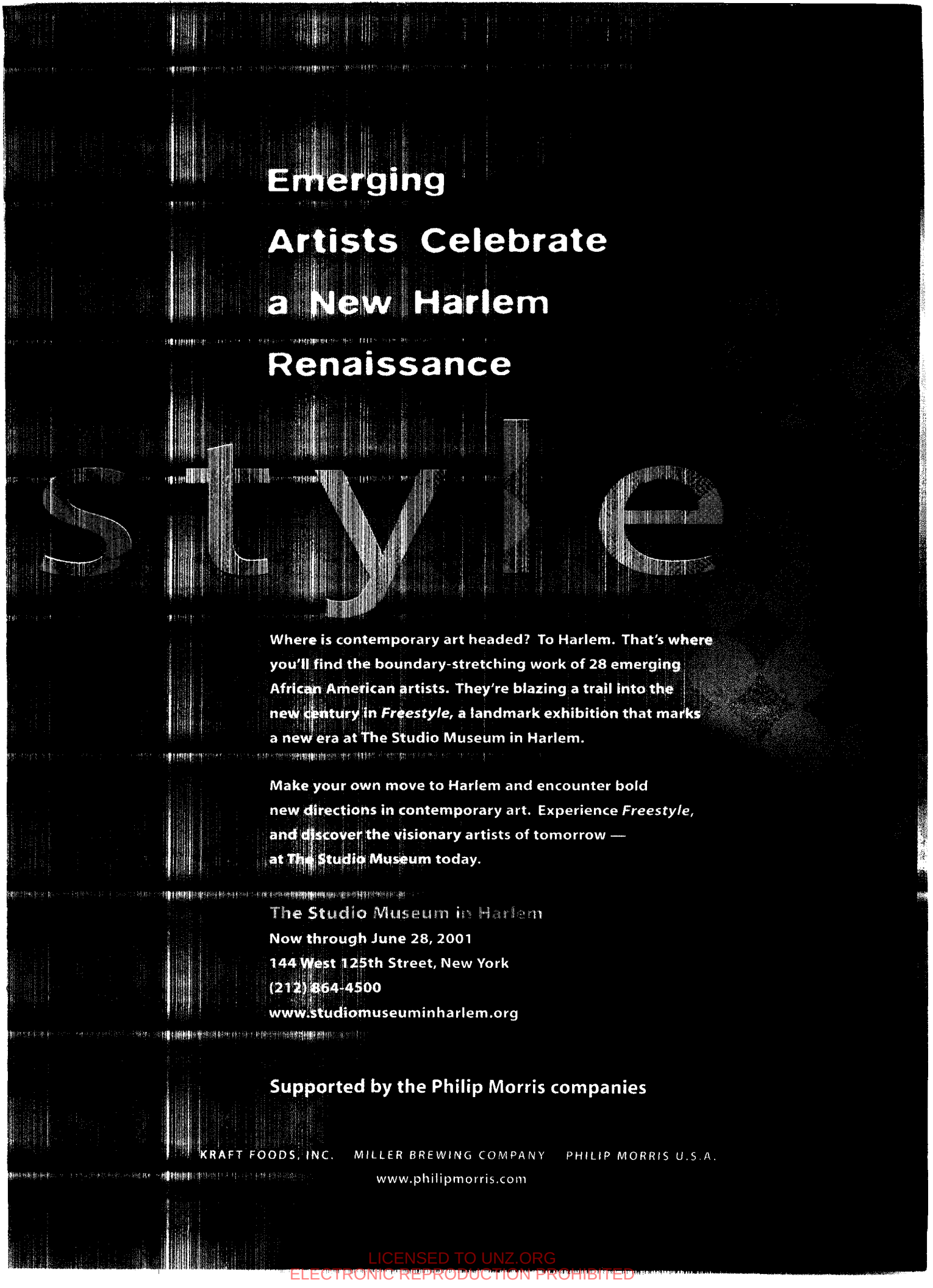
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CORRESPONDENCE

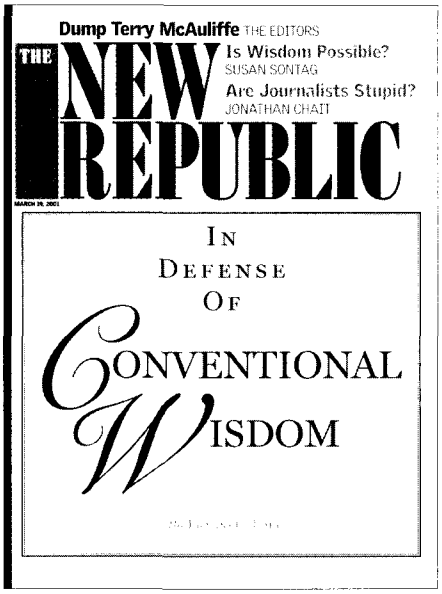
Democratic convention

TO THE EDITORS:
In the first paragraph of his story on conventional wisdom ("CW▲," March 19), Franklin Foer flirts with the idea that nobody would defend Adolf Hitler today and misses the obvious point that once upon a time—within living memory—Hitler's policies were the conventional wisdom for a large, well-educated, modern European nation. Foer also errs in suggesting that, at worst, conventional wisdom can be, well, conventional. Consider some of the following conventional wisdom: American colonies should remain loyal to the British crown; it's OK to keep slaves; it's OK to murder ethnic Albanians living in Serbia, generation after generation; no woman may venture out in public showing more than one eye; and the best way to avoid harm from a volcano is to make sacrifices to the volcano god. I guess even Foer wouldn't support the correctness of these pieces of conventional wisdom. His argument—that CW is always right—is shallow nonsense. CW ain't always right, and often it's very destructive. Not, of course, always.

PAUL KUNINO LYNCH
Via the Internet

TO THE EDITORS:
While generally insightful, Franklin Foer's defense of conventional wisdom is ultimately something of a muddle. Foer confuses at least three different issues with regard to CW: (1) the predictive accuracy of average short-term projections; (2) the superiority of "slow" over "rapid" change; and (3) the fundamental accuracy of the middle ground. Foer claims that, "in essence, CW is the average of the punditry's opinions," and we should believe it to be reliable because of experimental studies on "collective solutions." But these studies deal with relatively simple guesses about closed systems. They have very little to do with the predictions of pundits about interactions in complex and open political systems.

It is strange to see Foer invoke the "marketplace of ideas" metaphor, since John Stuart Mill argued that the marketplace could not work unless individuality and nonconformity were allowed to flourish. Even if Foer is right to dismiss such concerns, there is nothing inevitable about the triumph of good ideas in the face of the "conservatism" of CW. As Max Weber wrote in his editorial statement for the *Archiv*: "Scientifically the 'middle course' is not truer even by a hair's breadth, than



the most extreme party ideals of the right or left. Nowhere are the interests of science more poorly served in the long run than in these situations where one refuses to see uncomfortable facts and the realities of life in all their starkness."

DANIEL NEXON
Preceptor of Contemporary Civilization
Department of Political Science
Columbia University
New York, New York

TO THE EDITORS:
I enjoyed Franklin Foer's paradoxical demonstration that the pliable David Gergen is our greatest mastermind. Still, I question Foer's assertion that skepticism about conventional wisdom begins with the New Left. As the Roman poet Horace put it: "*Interdum volgus rectum videt, est ubi peccat*"—or, loosely: "Sometimes the conventional wisdom is right, sometimes it's wrong."

STEVE BADRICH
San Antonio, Texas

Controlling authority

TO THE EDITORS:
I was amused by the juxtaposition of Franklin Foer's defense of conventional wisdom with Jonathan Chait's "Read No Evil" (March 19). Foer's willfully naïve defense of convention and authority reminds me of Hans-Georg Gadamer's famous defense of prejudice ("Among the prejudices in favor of authorities there might be some that are true"), but Gadamer thought it was of the utmost importance "to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we *understand*, from the *false* ones, by which we *misunderstand*." Foer seems not to give much weight to the distinction.

In a straightforward and persuasive article that should embarrass Foer, Chait points out that the media has uncritically perpetuated the spin and the lies of the Bush administration and, indeed, has created a false conventional wisdom. His article is a nice example of the media's healthy interrogation of CW. "The sky is blue"; "bigotry is bad"; "the Bush tax cut is A-OK." Could Foer tell us which of these statements is not like the others?

TAYLOR HUDSON
New Haven, Connecticut

TO THE EDITORS:
Jonathan Chait makes some good points in "Read No Evil" on the media's treatment of the Bush tax plan, but his self-righteousness is a bit overdone. There is some justification for treating FICA taxes separately from general income taxes, because Social Security is supposed to have some elements in common with pension programs and insurance disability programs, in which you get the benefit only if you make contributions or pay premiums. We all know it doesn't work exactly like either, but it was intended to have elements of both, not to be a general welfare program. Unlike with income taxes, what one receives in Social Security is supposed to bear some relationship to what one contributes, so Bush has some reason to treat it differently.

Even though FICA taxes may be "regressive," most analysts say the program is already one that ultimately tends to redistribute wealth from upper-income citizens to lower-income citizens. Proposals to effectively rebate payroll taxes without reducing the benefits those individuals receive would make it even more redistributive.

DAVID SHAW
San Marcos, California

God only knows

TO THE EDITORS:
TNR praises "the belief in culture" and the strength of American democracy in keeping American religion in check (Notebook, March 19). But it was organized religion in America (specifically black churches) that fought for civil rights throughout much of the twentieth century, while a belief in "Southern culture" sought to maintain segregation. Had the lauded American democracy had its way—and had the lauded American culture successfully kept the black church in check—God only knows where we would be as a nation today.

CHRIS DUCKWORTH
King of Prussia, Pennsylvania

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Well done

TO THE EDITORS:

As a foreign service officer who served in Honduras from 1987 to 1990, I believe Sarah Wildman's article "Contra Aide" (March 19) does a disservice to those of us who carry out American foreign policy, especially when it is difficult or controversial at home. John Dimitri Negroponte's stewardship in Honduras must be judged in terms of the overall success of U.S. policy in Central America. Maybe the best measure of success is that, for the past eight years, President Clinton was largely able to ignore Latin America in general and Central America in particular. But if this standard seems too shallow, then let us consider some facts:

(1) Honduras is at peace. It has had five consecutive civilian governments, all elected in internationally monitored and free elections. (2) The Salvadoran and Nicaraguan refugee camps are no more. (3) Hondurans didn't abandon their country in huge numbers. Illegal immigration from Honduras has never reached the high level from El Salvador. (4) The military in Honduras has less political clout than ever before. Evidence of this is that the police function has been taken away from the military. (5) The Contras are gone. (6) The United States never had to send a single American soldier to accomplish these objectives, and progress toward each was made on Negroponte's watch as U.S. ambassador to Honduras.

As for human rights, implicit in Wildman's article is the assumption that the U.S. embassy and the U.S. ambassador knew everything, controlled everything, and could order or prevent anything in the country. As anyone who has ever served overseas knows, this is nonsense. We did not know everything that was going on during my time in Honduras, and I'm willing to wager that we didn't know everything during Negroponte's time there, either. Wildman's article must be boiled down to the following: Negroponte should have tried harder to know whether human rights violations were taking place in Honduras. That is pretty shaky intellectual ground, but the article really misses the crucial point: Was Negroponte concentrating on the issues that were of fundamental importance to U.S. national interests? Here, I believe, the answer is an emphatic yes. Twenty years on, I'd say Negroponte's record deserves a sincere "Well done, Mr. Ambassador." From all of us.

DONALD C. JOHNSON
Arlington, Virginia

NEIGHBORS
The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland
Jan T. Gross

One summer day in 1941, half of the Polish town of Jedwabne murdered the other half—1,600 men, women, and children—all but seven of the town's Jews. Most arresting is the realization that Jedwabne's Jews were clubbed, drowned, gutted, and burned not by faceless Nazis, but by people they knew well. *Neighbors* describes what happened and tries to explain why.

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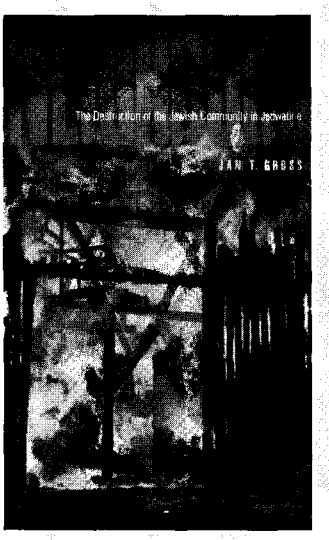

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Watch It

THE ABSTRACTION OF death is understandably popular. There is no reality like mortality, and we shrink from it as instinctually as we cover our ears in an explosion. The realest moment in my relatively short life was watching one of my friends at the moment of his death: a man younger than I, his throat engorged with plastic tubing, his hands pale and blue, sweat—even then—running down his neck to a pool on his chest. Watching that moment, actually being there at the very second another human being ceases to be, is ineffable and unforgettable. It changes you.

Your mind, weirdly enough, is captured by detail. We expect death to be magnificent or elevated. But we discover it to be as banal in detail as life. Someone's hair is messy. His nails need clipping. Can someone turn down that light? But it is detail that makes sense of it, proving that this life was real, like yours and mine, and that it will end. One of George Orwell's classic pieces of reportage, "A Hanging," written about an execution in Burma in 1931, is the best literary evocation I know of this. He witnessed, indeed helped perform, a routine execution of a routine criminal, a wiry little man with a huge mustache, an almost cartoonish figure in his miserable cell. Orwell watched as, on the morning of this criminal's death, the man was chained, gripped by his guards, and led through a grimy courtyard to the scaffold. "At each step," Orwell wrote, "his muscles slid neatly into place, the lock of hair on his scalp danced up and down, his feet printed themselves on the wet gravel. And once, in spite of the men who gripped him by each shoulder, he stepped slightly aside to avoid a puddle on the path."

For Orwell, that tiny movement opened up a world of thought. "It is curious," he noted, "but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man.... His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned—reasoned even about puddles." If it took this almost absurd moment to alert Orwell to the horror of state-sanctioned murder, what, one wonders, would it take for us?

I'm reminded of this by the current debate about whether the execution of Timothy McVeigh, scheduled for May 16, should be televised. Attorney General John Ashcroft has ruled that it will be shown on closed-circuit television to the families of the dozens of victims of the Oklahoma City bombing, but almost everyone else will be forbidden to see it. This is a curious enough arrangement, but, in our transparent media culture, it is truly bizarre. Television now shows people chained to one another for days on end, negotiating sexual intercourse; it drags cameras into police swoops against wife-beaters and drug-dealers; we see trials in all their minutiae; we watch tapes from closed-circuit cameras filming bank robbers and convenience-store thieves; we saw a president of the United States testify under oath about oral sex. But a public execution of a criminal responsible for one of the most heinous mass murders in recent history is out of bounds.

It would, we are told, turn McVeigh into a martyr. How? The only people even faintly predisposed to see this gawky coward as a hero will doubtless use the execution to support their deranged politics anyway—broadcast or not. No one else will be under any illusions about the gravity of the crime this man committed, and if people feel anything as his body twists in a final convulsion, it will surely be pity rather than admiration. Is it pity the authorities wish to prevent us from feeling? Perhaps compassionate conservatism has a few exceptions we should be more aware of.

Others worry about the opposite reaction: bloodthirsty satisfaction at justice being done. So be it. If supporters of the death penalty were more honest, they would fess up to the fact that part of the rationale for it is revenge. That, after all, is why the families of the victims have been allowed access. The fashionable term for this is to help those families achieve "closure." But for that they could witness McVeigh's funeral or burial. The point of their witnessing his final agony is obviously vengeance—the ultimate form of closure. But if the families get to experience this, why not everyone else? This was an act of terror, designed to spread fear beyond the victims and their families. Surely the terrorized deserve the full experience of vengeance as well.

The arrangement is also a curious solution for those who believe the death penalty is, above all, a deterrent. If it is designed to deter, wouldn't it be more effective if evidence of it were more widely disseminated? If this brutal form of punishment, abandoned in most civilized countries, is an instrument of intimidation, it makes no sense to hide it from view. In fact, invisible "public" executions are almost an oxymoron. They obscure what they are designed to illuminate.

And illumination is the point. Each year, Americans endorse and tolerate dozens of state-sanctioned executions. Each one of the condemned is a human being—breathing, thinking, and feeling until the final moment of terror. A society that accepts this but will not witness it is deeply cowardly. In fact, no moral argument in defense of the death penalty is, to my mind, plausible unless an individual is prepared to witness the death he has endorsed. Being somewhere else when the trigger is pulled is a form of denial, of moral escapism. The taking of a human life is not, after all, a trivial matter. It is the most profound act any human being can commit. To sanction it blithely, to acquiesce in it easily, to endorse it but not confront it, constitutes moral abdication. This is true for every citizen in a society that murders its murderers, but it is especially true of those in public office who sign the death warrants and campaign for office on the issue. I wish Arkansas's then-Governor Bill Clinton had possessed the fortitude to witness the execution of the mentally handicapped man he had executed while campaigning for the presidency. And I wish even more that our current president, who has the gall to give speeches about the "culture of life," had witnessed any one of the dozens of deaths he has personally sanctioned and once even joked about.

I bet he couldn't stomach it, and neither could we. Imagine if every execution were broadcast live on the Internet. There would be plenty of fans, of course, and plenty of gallows groupies. You only have to look at those grim historical photographs of white Southerners grinning and posing and exchanging small talk while a lynched Negro hangs nearby to see how easily we can be inured to evil. But, at the same time, if those pictures had never been taken, we wouldn't today be able to confront the moral choices that our predecessors once made. Denial and abstraction would have prevailed. Again, it is the confrontation with the visual and sensual details of killing that keeps us morally alert. That is why it is so important to keep images and even artifacts of the Holocaust, of slavery, of war. Sometimes it takes an odd piece of clothing, a discarded pair of spectacles, the avoidance of a puddle, to make us fully absorb what it is that we do. And if we cannot face what we do, what possible moral rationale do we have to continue doing it?

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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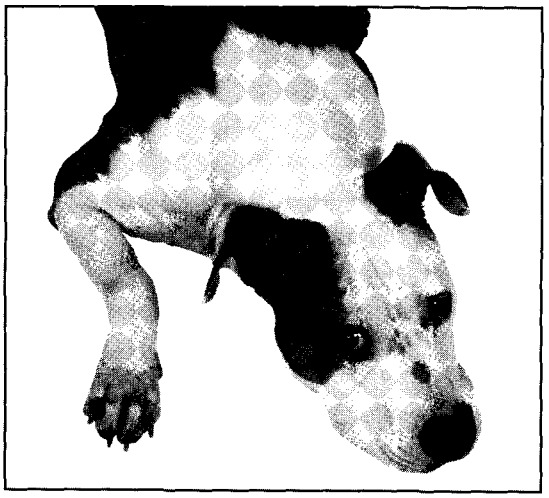

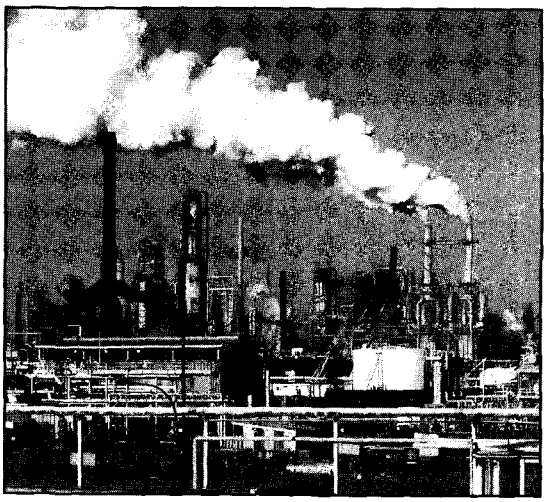

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A War After Peace

IS THERE WAR in the Middle East? Not in the most deadly sense, no; but otherwise, yes. The "Al-Aqsa intifada," the latest Palestinian paroxysm of self-destruction, has moved from stones to rifles to mortars. The night sky around Jerusalem is regularly punctuated by the deadly glowing dots of heavy gunfire. The Syrians, who dominate Lebanon with 35,000 troops, are permitting Hezbollah to strike at Israel, and Hezbollah is eagerly accepting their permission. (Will there be martyrs for Shabaa Farms, too?) And the government of Ariel Sharon has chosen to hold the attackers responsible for their attacks.

The Israeli responses to attacks upon Israel in the north and in the south have been designed to establish the principle that no bad deed will go unpunished, not least in the hope that all but the most deranged enemies of the Jewish state will think twice about aggression against it. Surely a policy of zero tolerance toward mortar shells flying across international borders into one's own country is not terribly hard to understand. (And just as surely there are those who refuse to understand it: the European Union condemned Israel for the use of excessive force in Gaza and Lebanon, in accordance with its old evenhanded view that the Israelis must rise above everything and the Palestinians must rise above nothing. But what, pray, is a Syrian radar station doing in the Bekaa Valley anyway?) So far the Bush administration appears not to have let its anxieties get the better of its sympathies, and has appeared to understand that Israel cannot idly absorb the shells and the bombs—that if the Israeli response emboldens Israel's enemies, the absence of an Israeli response emboldens them more. To be sure, Colin Powell last week discovered in the Israel Defense Forces an army to which his doctrine of overwhelming force seems not to apply; but Israel was right to pull out of Gaza, American demands or not. Sharon's annexation in northern Gaza was a mistake, because it would have made Israeli unreason into the issue, when the issue is Palestinian unreason, which has been more or less plain since Yasir Arafat chose a riot over a state last summer. The trick for Israel is to employ its physical strength without squandering its political strength.

The important thing, as the responses and the responses to the responses continue, is not to lose sight of the larger historical picture. It is worth remembering, for example, that the shelling of Israel in recent weeks has originated in places from which the Israeli army has completely withdrawn. After Israel retaliated for the attacks from Lebanon by striking the power that controls Lebanon, the Egyptian foreign minister thundered that the action "renders meaningless Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon." This is backward. The Hezbollah attack was what demonstrated that the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon was meaningless—for Hezbollah, that is, and for Bashar al-Assad. And this has been the pattern also on the Palestinian front. (It is, alas, a front.) There, too, Israeli flexibility has been met with a renewal of violence.

The conflict is becoming more comprehensive by the week. But it did not have to be this way. Last summer—we will repeat the tale until we are hoarse, because it is still the truth, and because it is still startling—Israel offered (arguably too generously) to withdraw to the boundaries of 1949–1967 so that a Palestinian state could be proclaimed, with its capital in Jerusalem and its flag over the Haram al-Sharif. Israel offered, in other words, to be a partner in the realization of the Palestinians' fondest dream, and also in their relief from the misery of their refugee camps. But the Palestinians said no, and sent their children into the streets. The war that we are now witnessing is a war that the Palestinians and their regional allies have explicitly preferred to peace. And all the pretty songs about peace—in *The New York Times* this week Yossi Beilin sang another one, about how "they are here, we are here, neither of us chose the other as a neighbor, and neither is going anywhere"—cannot alter this fantastically sobering fact. With the exception of its doves who have eyes but do not see, Israel is now a country disabused, a society of realists. Just as a siege seemed to be ending, a siege began. Life is once again a sentence of self-defense. A war before peace is much easier to fight than a war after peace, because one can carry hope into the struggle; but for Israel this feels like a war after peace. ■

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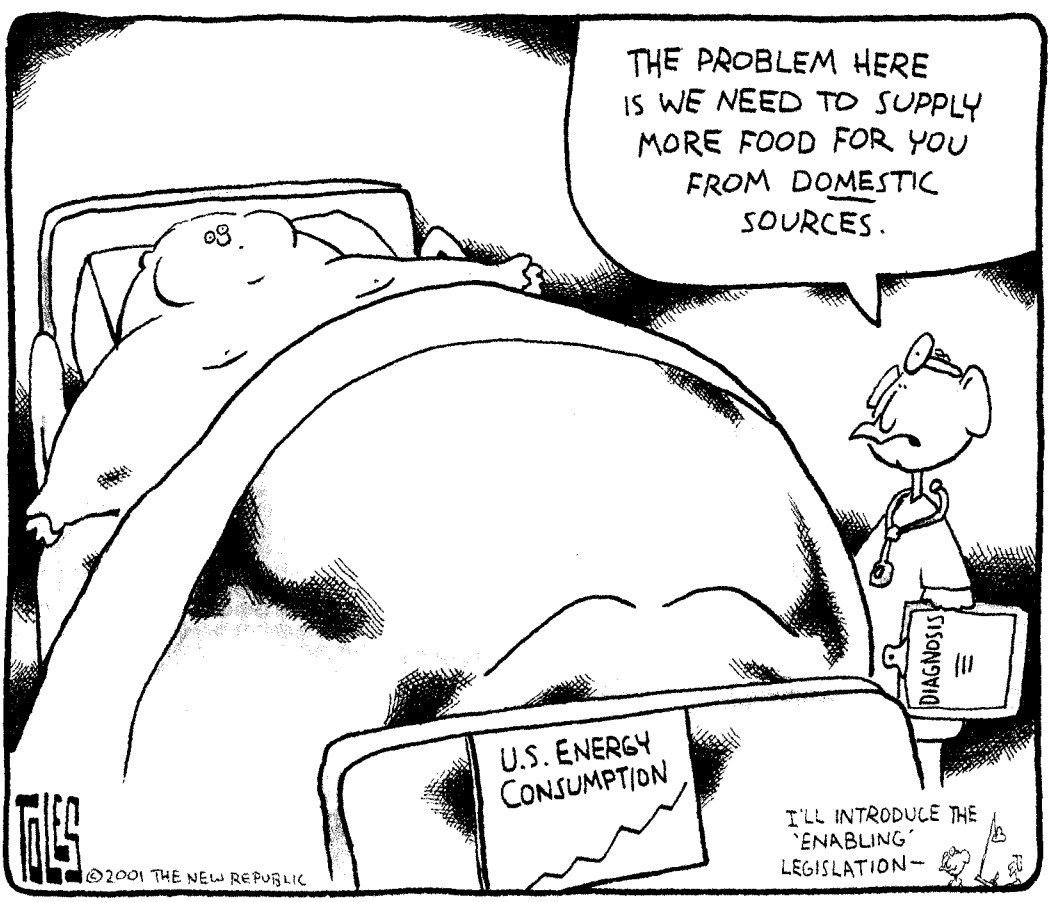
NOTEBOOK

POISON PILL: For a long time, the debate over abortion has encompassed a related debate about the motivations of the people who oppose abortion. Christian conservatives say they are motivated by their desire to save unborn human life. Feminists say that is a smoke screen—that the Christian right is actually motivated by a desire to deny women control over reproduction so they will be forced back into the home. That is why the Christian right usually treads gingerly around the question of contraception, merely trying to stop its distribution to minors so as not to condone teen sex. After all, traditional contraception does not kill a fetus; between consenting adults, it raises no moral problem at all, right? Wrong, according to the Bush administration. Last week the administration slipped into the appendix of its budget outline a tiny paragraph that would end coverage of a broad range of prescription contraceptive options currently provided under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan (FEHBP). A spokesperson for the Family Research Council told *The Washington Post* the budget proposal was brought to its attention at a briefing for conservative groups as one of several "things that will please you." But why should it? Most of the covered forms of birth control can in no rational way be construed as forms of abortion—women on the pill, for example, don't even *ovulate*. Nor does the benefit tempt teens to sin, since it is not extended to minors. The only explanation that makes any sense is the one conservatives have long denied—that they wish to deny consenting, adult women the right to decide when they want to have children. There's a biblical basis to this view, of course—no spilling of the seed, sex not designed for procreation is immoral, and so on. But if the religious right wants to bring this piece of theology to bear on the public policy debate, it should do so forthrightly—and watch its public standing sink even lower than it is today.

COLOR-BLIND: In the run-up to this week's flag referendum in Mississippi, in which voters were asked to choose between a 107-year-old design featuring the Confederate cross and a new one without it, supporters of the new design portrayed the vote as a simple business proposition. "[T]his isn't about black or white," explained George Shelton, executive director of a business group called the Mississippi Legacy Fund, which spearheaded the campaign for a new flag. "It's about green. This is an economic issue." It wasn't that those who favored the new flag found the old flag offensive, you see. Rather, they worried that it might be found so by others, *outside* Mississippi, who would then be reluctant to invest in the state. "It's not right that our kids can't find good jobs close to home because companies won't locate in our state, but it's a fact," read one flyer mailed out by supporters of the new flag. "They have the wrong idea about Mississippi." So what idea should one take from the fact that, on April 17, Mississippians voted by a two-to-one margin in favor of keeping the old design, Confederate cross and all? The vote has been described as an economic setback for the state, with Mississippians worrying that they will now be subject to the same sort of economic boycotts that the NAACP recently led in South Carolina and threatened in Georgia. But the vote was not primarily an economic setback. It was a moral setback. It demonstrates that two-thirds of Mississippians, whatever their overall racial views (and whatever their race), are still unconcerned about the Confederate symbol, a symbol that represents slavery—as a matter of historical record and in the minds of most people whose forebears suffered under slavery's yoke. Supporters of the new-flag movement say they explicitly avoided making this sort of moral argument because they didn't want to inflame passions or alienate potential supporters. Much good it did them. The next time the flag issue rears its head in Mississippi, as it most cer-


THE PROBLEM HERE IS WE NEED TO SUPPLY MORE FOOD FOR YOU FROM DOMESTIC SOURCES.
DIAGNOSIS
U.S. ENERGY CONSUMPTION
I'LL INTRODUCE THE 'ENABLING' LEGISLATION—
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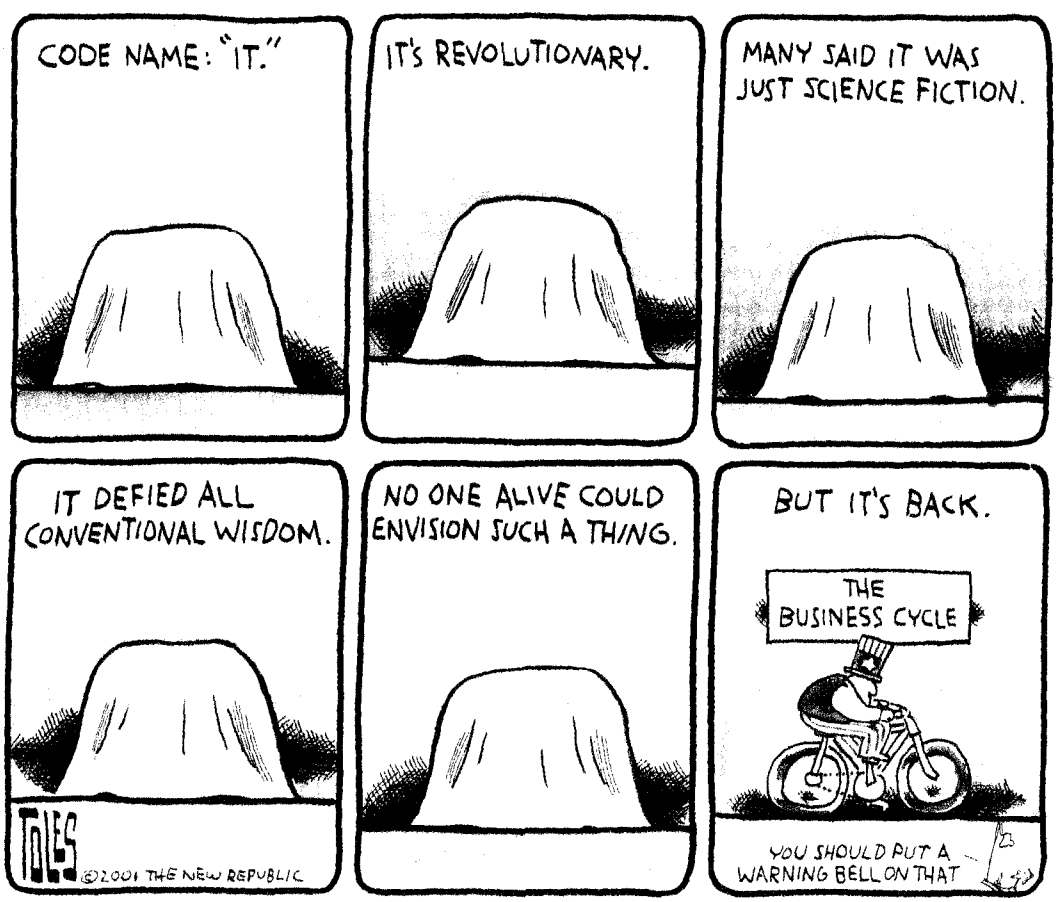
tainly will, opponents of the Confederate design should engage it as the moral question it ineluctably is. At least that way, if and when Mississippians choose to retain the old Confederate cross, no one will think they are merely making a business statement.

TAKING STOCK: There is a movement afoot in Congress to add capital gains rate cuts to President Bush's tax bill. What distinguishes this from other movements to lard up Bush's bill with even more upper-income tax breaks is that the capital-gains-cutters enjoy bipartisan support from no less a Democratic luminary than Joe Lieberman. "Almost half of the American people own stocks," Lieberman told *The Wall Street Journal*, "so the capital-gains reduction is no longer just a rich person's tax break." Oh, yes it is. It's true that lots of workers now own a bit of stock. But many of those middle-income stockholders own their shares in tax-free pension plans. Since those plans aren't taxed anyway, those workers wouldn't gain anything from a reduction in the capital gains tax. According to Citizens for Tax Justice, this year fewer than one in seven workers had *any* taxable capital gains. Even among those that did, a tiny minority would reap most of the gains from the proposed cut. After all, two-thirds of stock is held by the highest-earning 1 percent of the population. Of course, that sort of upward redistribution might be worthwhile if it would help the economy. But it wouldn't. The most economically efficient arrangement would be to tax all forms of income—from labor and from capital—at the same rate and let the market sort out how much of each it wants to supply. Bush economic adviser Larry Lindsey has said that "capital should be taxed." We haven't said this before, and we may never say it again, but: Joe Lieberman should listen to Larry Lindsey.

WE KNOW THE RIGHT HAS GONE SOFT ON CHINA, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS: "I don't agree with [government-mandated abortions in China]. But, at the same time, they've got 1.2 billion people, and they don't know what to do.... I don't agree with the forced abortion, but I don't think the United States needs to interfere with what they're doing internally in this regard."—Pat Robertson, CNN, April 16

IT'S NOT P.R., JUST ONE SEASONED MILITARY MAN TALKING TO ANOTHER: "The president recognizes that from time to time there will be emotional and volatile events; he does not believe that politicians should seek them out and insert themselves in them."—White House press secretary Ari Fleischer, describing the president's decision not to attend homecoming ceremonies for the spy-plane crewmembers detained in China, April 13

"At the White House, officials fed reporters bits of 'Top Gun' dialogue between [U.S. pilot Shane] Osborn and President George W. Bush.... 'As an old F-102 pilot,' Bush responded, 'let me tell you, Shane, you did a heck of a job bringing that airplane in.'" —*Newsweek*, April 23 issue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IT'S REVOLUTIONARY.
MANY SAID IT WAS JUST SCIENCE FICTION.
IT DEFIED ALL CONVENTIONAL WISDOM.
NO ONE ALIVE COULD ENVISION SUCH A THING.
BUT IT'S BACK.
THE BUSINESS CYCLE
YOU SHOULD PUT A WARNING BELL ON THAT
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DEPARTMENT OF OMISSIONS: An article in last week's issue, "Sullied Heritage," omitted a reference to the conservative website *WorldNetDaily.com*, which has published several stories about Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, her father, and the Heritage Foundation. Earlier versions of this article—itself the product of three months of reporting—acknowledged the work of *WorldNetDaily.com* and other conservative websites, but, due to a late editing error, a specific reference to *WorldNetDaily.com*'s contribution was deleted. We regret the omission. ■

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On the Hill

Strom?

By Michael Crowley

Sen. Leahy: Mr. Chairman. We're ready to vote.
Sen. Hatch: Well, I understand Senator Thurmond is coming and I'd like to give him that—here he is right here. As soon as he gets up here—
Sen. Leahy : We'll all wait for Senator Thurmond.
Sen. Hatch : We'll all wait for Senator Thurmond. As soon as he gets here, we will have our vote.
Sen. [unidentified]: There he is....
Sen. Leahy : Hey, Strom.
[Pause]
Sen. Leahy : I said we wouldn't wait for anybody else, but we'd wait for you.
Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC): Huh?
—Excerpt from Senate Judiciary Committee hearing transcript, January 30, 2001

These days, when Strom Thurmond does something as simple as walk down a hall, it constitutes a minor news event. On a late March afternoon, the 98-year-old Republican emerges from the Senate floor and moves slowly through a small crowd of tourists and reporters. All heads turn as Thurmond slowly shuffles past, hunched and glassy-eyed, clinging with both hands to the elbow of an assistant. He walks in a series of tiny staccato steps, each of them a small ordeal, traveling at a tectonic pace. His wispy hair cowlicks above his scalp, and his mouth hangs open in a kind of permanent gasp. A pair of young children look slightly alarmed. Even the Capitol police officers stare in amazement.

Thurmond has led a remarkable life. Born before communism, he has, for all practical purposes, outlived it. He met Confederate soldiers who fought at Gettysburg. He fought at Normandy, by then already old enough to need special permission. He ran for president against Harry Truman in 1948. Now he is finishing his eighth term as a Republican senator from South Carolina. But, after soldiering impressively through most of his nineties, Strom has begun to falter. Hospital visits have become routine, and he has given up his years-long ritual of gaveling the Senate into session every morning. In January he missed his first presidential address to Congress in decades. "There was some turn for the worse about two months ago," says a Democratic staffer who sees Thurmond often. "He just appeared to be more frail.... There are embarrassing pauses, he struggles to recognize someone."

If people stare at Thurmond, it's not simply out of morbid fascination—one simply doesn't see people in his condition outside of hospitals and nursing homes. It's because Thurmond's health has enormous political significance. Thanks to Dick Cheney's tie-breaking vote, Republicans effectively control the 50-50 Senate: chairing committees, setting voting schedules, dominating conference committees, and winning party-line votes. Should Thurmond die or become incapacitated (senators must physically appear on the floor to vote), all that would change. South Carolina's Democratic governor, Jim Hodges, would appoint a Democrat to replace him. Suddenly the Senate would be 51-49, and Tom Daschle, not Trent Lott, would be majority leader.

In public, no one discusses that possibility. "No, my goodness ... Strom's fine!" declares a faux-upbeat Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania. "Strom's in good shape!" But, behind the scenes, Thurmond's health is the elephant in the living room. With the political stakes so high, there is a kind of quiet vigil under way on Capitol Hill, one that has staffers' phones ringing furiously every time Thurmond gets dizzy. "Members and aides are constantly saying, 'Have you seen Strom? What's the latest on Strom?' There's a certain amount of buzz," says one Democratic Senate aide. Adds another top Democratic staffer: "Word goes around every day about whether he makes it into the building. There's a Strom Watch."

Or, as one beat reporter quipped to another in the Senate press gallery one recent afternoon, "You see Strom? Any day now."

It's after nine o'clock on the Senate floor one evening in early April, and weary senators are still working on a budget resolution that requires all of them to be present for a series of votes on amendments. From the press gallery, most senators can be seen bustling about: whispering in small clusters, poring over paperwork, or just roaming the floor to banter and backslap with colleagues.

Thurmond, meanwhile, sits silently at his desk, staring blankly ahead. When other senators stop by to say hello, Thurmond seems barely able to muster the energy for a weak handshake. (His face lights up only once, when Hillary Clinton strays into view.)

Beside Thurmond sit a pair of aides who, during roll-call votes, appear to explain to him what is happening and how to vote. "Mr. Thurmond," the stentorian Senate clerk calls. Then a pause. An aide leans over and audibly whispers, "Aye" or "Nay"—but oh-so casually, as if telling Thurmond his fly was open. There is another pause before Thurmond dutifully bleats out the word. At one point, even this process breaks down: After Thurmond is called, his aides whisper, "Aye." Silence. Then, with increasing urgency: "Aye. *Aye*." Finally, Thurmond nods, lifting a thin finger to deliver a warbly, Southern-inflected "Aaahhh...."

On the Hill, it is common knowledge that Thurmond's staff makes the policy decisions. Indeed, one high-ranking Democratic staffer says Thurmond's longtime chief of staff, Robert "Duke" Short, "serves effectively as a senator." Short has his hands full. Thurmond is prone to embarrassing mistakes, such as when he told a local South Carolina newspaper in December that he was about to turn 88, off by a decade. When Thurmond shows up for committee hearings—an increasingly rare occurrence—he either doesn't speak or reads in a slurred and uncomprehending voice from prepared note cards. When the *Charleston Post and Courier* asked him a few weeks ago about the Bush tax cut, "Thur-

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Rogue-Patron Linkages in an Emerging World Order

Thomas H. Henriksen is a senior fellow and associate director at the Hoover Institution.

What a difference a decade makes in international politics. Just ten years ago, the Soviet Union collapsed, China seemed mired in domestic concerns, and the United States appeared headed for a carefree era. Pundits pontificated about a security vacuum while Washington slashed defense spending.

At that time, the so-called rogue states, like Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, were the only clouds looming on the horizon. Isolated internationally, these pariahs demonstrated a propensity for internal cruelty and external threats. They coveted weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear and biological warheads, and missiles to deliver their deadly payloads. Unpredictable and erratic, they entered Washington's consciousness solely as insular but containable troublemakers.

The United States paid little heed to Moscow or Beijing as it groped for policies to engage or contain rogue states. Our approach fluctuated from confronting Iraq through sanctions, ostracism, and occasional bombing to engaging North Korea through rewarding perceived nuclear restraint with concessions in hopes of changing Pyongyang's behavior.

By the end of the 1990s, the rogue regimes no longer looked so isolated from the major powers. Russia and China sold arms and technology to them, took up their cause in the Security Council as Washington sought to enforce United Nations sanctions against them, and, more recently, reestablished or deepened diplomatic ties.

A series of events dramatically announced this turnaround. China's uproar following the accidental bombing of its embassy in Belgrade during NATO's Kosovo air campaign demonstrated that Washington could not lead an attack on rogue-like Serbia without big power consequences. Another example surfaced when North Korea's leader, Kim Jung Il, first consulted with Beijing before agreeing to the historic summit with his South Korean counterpart last June. The recent Russian and Iranian agreement to strengthen military ties is another illustration of this trend.

Rogue states and their former patrons are cooperating for reasons vastly different from their cold war collaboration. Then, Moscow sought to spread communism in the Third World. Devoid of ideological objectives, Russia and China now seek to expand arm sales and exert leverage with Washington for geopolitics, pure and simple. Beijing can turn up the heat on the United States for supporting Taiwan—which China considers its territory—by improving Iraq's air defense systems and selling missile technology to Pakistan, Libya, and Syria. Because Moscow resents U.S. influence in the Balkans and its spearheading the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into Eastern Europe, it exports tanks and artillery to Iraq and cooperates with Iran to build a nuclear power plant. By confronting the United States asymmetrically, Russia and China can redress their military and political weakness vis-à-vis the sole superpower.

These transformed political realities demand a rethinking of American policy. **Washington must see the world in global terms,** not through a narrow lens trained on a lone maverick. A strategy for undoing the rogue-patron affiliations should also be incorporated into U.S. relations with Moscow and Beijing. Whatever the mix of diplomacy and force, Washington cannot be complacent with the emerging rogue-patron collusion.

— Thomas H. Henriksen

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mond hunted around his desk for a note card, then read his response: 'I support the president's plan to reduce income tax rates,' he said. 'It is the right remedy to strengthen economic expansion....'" Episodes like this have grown frequent enough that last month *The Hill*, a inside-Congress weekly, called upon Thurmond to retire, saying it was impossible to know "whether the senator is running his staff, or his staff is running him."

But Thurmond's office insists he won't resign before his planned retirement when his term ends next year. It's one topic, in fact, on which Thurmond himself still speaks robustly. Though the senator's office turns down interview requests from all but local South Carolina media, a CBS News reporter recently confronted Thurmond with questions about his health. "They got me one foot in the grave," he replied. "They're all wrong... I'll outlive all of them."

The White House isn't as confident. George W. Bush may already be racing to pass his tax cut before his honeymoon expires, but the Strom factor only adds to the urgency. "Right now," GOP Representative Steve Largent recently told *National Journal*'s *CongressDaily*, "I can tell you that the Bush administration is looking at tax cuts, filling federal judicial slots, and doing everything that they ... need Senate approval on—as quickly as they possibly can, while we still have Strom Thurmond with us."

Consider, for example, the effect of Thurmond's departure on Bush's $1.6 trillion tax cut proposal. Suddenly, Democrats would have a majority on the Senate Finance Committee, which will shape the details of any tax plan. Daschle could refuse to bring a cut to the floor at all. And, even if a Bush-friendly tax bill did make it out of committee, Democrats could undo a GOP-passed resolution that currently insulates it from a filibuster—meaning a mere 40 Democratic votes would kill the measure.

YET, BLEAK AS things may seem for Thurmond, the Strom Watch could well end up lasting until his retirement. As *Slate.com*'s Jacob Weisberg has noted, actuarial data suggests a man his age has a 50 percent chance of living two more years. And Thurmond still shows occasional bursts of energy and lucidity. When a heckler interrupted Attorney General John Ashcroft's confirmation hearing in January, Thurmond snapped out of his usual daze and shouted, "Get him out and keep him out!"

Or consider this bizarre expression of vigor from that late-night budget debate in the Senate a couple of weeks ago. After sitting nearly motionless and silent for most of the evening, Thurmond suddenly rose from his chair. He placed his hands on his desk, settled his body at a 45-degree angle, and commenced a series of small push-ups. He looked precarious, and never did his arm bend more than 30 degrees or so, but he did about 25 of them all the same.

His aides just smiled, as if they had seen this before. And they may well have—Thurmond has always been known as a physical-fitness buff. But his staffers aren't taking any chances. As soon as Thurmond sat down again, one of them handed him a glass of water and watched patiently to make sure he finished it. These days, one can't be too careful. ■

W. the environmentalist.

Health Nut

By GREGG EASTERBROOK

HERE'S A FRONT-PAGE story from the *Alternate Universe Tribune*: "BUSH ADMINISTRATION MAKES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION EARLY THEME." Ridiculous, right? We all know the new administration is engaged in "the most alarming rollbacks in environmental efforts that we have ever seen" (Richard Gephardt). Or, as Hearst newspaper columnist Helen Thomas "asked" at Bush's most recent press conference: "[Y]ou have rolled back health and safety and environmental measures. This has been widely interpreted as a payback time to your corporate donors. Are they more important than the American people's health and safety?"

Yet the *Alternate Universe Tribune* has it right. On almost every environmental issue, Bush has upheld the Clinton-Gore position. The new president is guilty of a few missteps, which are getting reams of attention, and has accomplished important advances, which are being ignored. Journalists and liberal commentators have had so much success in recent years pillorying conservatives as foes of the environment that it's become a kind of reflex. But this time the evidence isn't there.

First, take Bush's much-mocked decision to postpone a reduction in the maximum allowable arsenic in drinking water. This was indeed a mistake, as the scientific case for tighter rules is strong. But Bush has not acted to "allow more arsenic in drinking water," as commentary has erroneously asserted, nor to force Americans to consume "poisoned drinking water," as a *New York Times* editorial claimed. All he's done is delay the date on which trace levels of arsenic are cut. This is *precisely* what Bill Clinton and Al Gore did for almost eight years—postponing any tightening of the standard until just before leaving the White House, because new rules are stridently opposed by a few localities where arsenic naturally occurs in water, such as Albuquerque, New Mexico, where the mayor is a Democrat. Clinton's delay was unfortunate, as was Bush's, but not catastrophic, since arsenic is not one of America's leading environmental problems. It occurs in drinking water at worrisome levels in only a few areas of the country, and public health estimates show at worst a 1 percent increase in the odds of late-life cancer for someone who consumes such water for decades.

Contrast the media furor over Bush's arsenic decision with the near silence regarding his action on diesel-fuel reformulation. One of the president's first actions was to uphold a sweeping, expensive regulation that requires petroleum companies to remove most pollutants from diesel fuel. Unlike the arsenic standards, which would have benefited a tiny percentage of the population, the diesel-fuel rule has broad environmental and public-health consequences. Recent research has shown that the "particulates" in diesel

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exhaust lead to 20,000 or more premature deaths per year and contribute to the rise of asthma in cities. Bush's strict new diesel rules will spare many lives and reduce urban haze; in fact, they represent the most important anti-air-pollution advance in a decade. The reform will also cost billions of dollars, and it came over the howls of the petroleum industry, whose pocket Bush supposedly is in. Yet W.'s move has received virtually no recognition—after all, the diesel-fuel decision interrupts the doomsday script.

Consider another act for which Bush has been damned: his request that Congress suspend for one year the filing of lawsuits demanding that more plants and animals be listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On its front page, *The New York Times* portrayed this as a horrifying step backward. Yet the Clinton administration did almost exactly the same thing: Last year Clinton suspended the classification of plants and animals as endangered, saying the Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the ESA, was so snowed under by frivolous or dilatory lawsuits that it couldn't get its work done. The *Times* account was craftily written to depict the Bush decision as an unprecedented departure, not mentioning Clinton's similar policy until the fourteenth paragraph, and then only obliquely.

ROBERT NEUBECKER

Bush has also been attacked for merely *considering* overturning regulations requiring big increases in the energy efficiency of air conditioners, washers, dryers, and other appliances. But when he announced that the appliance standard would be upheld and the air-conditioner standard only mildly loosened, less attention was paid. He's been similarly scolded in the *Times* and other papers for *considering* reversing Clinton's eleventh-hour decision to reduce logging in national forests; but when Bush then appointed, as head of the Forest Service, a man instrumental in drawing up the less-logging policy, the *Times* buried the article on page A15. Bush also won little praise for upholding most of Clinton's eleventh-hour designations of new national wilderness areas, set-asides that were highly unpopular in much of the West. Bush decided this week to keep strict new limits on construction in wetlands—angering developers, another natural Bush constituency, who hate wetlands rules with a white passion—and also to impose strict standards regarding lead emissions. These moves were widely depicted as puzzling departures from form. But it only seemed that way because the media had misconstrued so many of Bush's other decisions.

Then there is Bush's abandonment of the Kyoto global-warming treaty, for which he's been hammered as an antediluvian. Yet the president might plausibly have said, "I have decided to continue the Clinton-Gore approach to global warming," since the previous administration took no binding action on Kyoto either. Clinton never submitted the Kyoto agreement to the Senate because he knew it stood no chance of ratification. In a 1997 test ballot, the Senate went on record 95 to zero against a Kyoto resolution; it didn't get a single Democratic vote.

In other words, the deal was history well before Bush took office. Any lingering hope ended last fall, when the European Union essentially rejected America's attempt to add to the agreement an international "carbon trading" system, which economists almost unanimously view as the best hope for near-term, affordable greenhouse-gas reduction. Canada's environment minister, David Anderson, has said the European Union rejected carbon trading specifically to make Kyoto fail: "Europe adopted a position they knew would force the United States to pull out." Why? Because Europe didn't want to do anything about the greenhouse effect but wanted the United States to take the blame. American commentators have happily parroted Europe's line.

Bush's father harmed himself when he turned from pro-environmental (backer of the 1990 Clean Air Act) to anti-environmental (snarling about spotted owls) as the 1992 campaign began; Newt Gingrich and the 1995 House Republicans saw their popularity sink in part because of their efforts to repeal environmental laws. From these episodes, Democrats, enviros, and reporters seeking an instant-doomsday slant have grown adept at bashing Republicans with preposterous overstatements and phony claims of ecological crises. The White House's inability to see this coming is bad politics. For example, the current legal maximum for arsenic in drinking water is 50 parts per billion; the proposed rule Bush delayed would have made it ten parts per billion, a level some studies suggest is regulatory overkill. Bush could have split the difference and announced a new standard of 25 parts per billion, saying he was making the rule twice as strict.

But bad p.r. and bad policy aren't the same thing. With the exception of oil exploration in Alaska, so far there are no meaningful differences between Bush's environmental goals and those of Clinton and Gore. This is surprising and to Bush's credit. It's time the press started giving him some. ■

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Reagan unremembered.
Teflon

By NICHOLAS CONFESSORE

IF INDIANA IS the Republican stronghold of the Midwest, then Hamilton County—a prosperous, fast-growing suburb outside Indianapolis—is the Republican stronghold of Indiana. The county regularly backs GOP presidential candidates by a margin of nearly four to one and, as part of the sixth congressional district, bears partial responsibility for conspiracy-hound Dan Burton. So, when the time came last February to consider names for a new high school in the town of Fishers, it was only natural that someone would recommend naming it after Ronald Reagan, who had just celebrated his ninetieth birthday. "If we take an easy and uncreative route by naming this school simply after its location, we will be wasting an opportunity," Young Republican activist Jeff Heinzmann declared in a speech before the Hamilton Southeastern School Board. But naming it after Reagan, he argued, would offer "an opportunity to celebrate. An opportunity to inspire. And an opportunity to give a small measure of thanks."

And then, recalls interim Superintendent Charles Leonard, Heinzmann "went on to say that there was a Reagan foundation that might contribute some funds for signage if that were done." In fact, says Leonard, "We started getting e-mails here suggesting that it be 'Ronald Wilson Reagan High School.' But we were getting them from outside our school district. They were aggressive." The badgering backfired: In the end, 88 recommendations for "Fishers High School" beat out 41 suggestions for Reagan.

This is not how it was supposed to be. As the Gipper turned 90, his acolytes spoke of a veritable epidemic of Reaganmania sweeping across the land. "Ronald Reagan is loved and admired by millions of Americans, and by countless others around the world," read a House joint resolution that President Bush signed in January. "On his 90th birthday, the Gipper's influence on America today is greater than it was twenty years ago," wrote *The National Review*'s Larry Kudlow. Anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist even testified in favor of a bill, sponsored by GOP Representative James Hansen, to memorialize the still-living Reagan on the National Mall—right there with Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. "Clearly," Norquist told a House committee, "America loved Ronald Reagan, and the Congress should recognize the will of the people by passing this bill."

There's just one problem with this nostalgic groundswell for the Gipper: It doesn't exist. Since Norquist launched the Ronald Reagan Legacy Project in 1997—aiming to have Reagan honored in every one of the nation's 3,067 counties—the number of Reagan dedications has crept upward from eleven to about 45. And the going has been tough. In 1998 Republican Speaker Jim King (with Norquist's help) pushed legislation through the Florida assembly to rename the 312-mile Florida Turnpike after Reagan—generating so many angry phone calls that, as King later told the press, "[y]ou'd have thought I'd nominated Hitler." The Ronald Reagan Federal Courthouse in Santa Ana, California, almost lost its congressional funding in 1994; when the building prepared to open four years later, it was discovered that planners had neglected to buy a likeness of the former president to adorn the new structure. To date, 38 U.S. states don't have a single Reagan dedication.

This is no particular knock for Reagan, who was, after all, among the most popular presidents of the twentieth century. But with the exception of John F. Kennedy—whose tragic death triggered an immediate outpouring of national admiration—presidential greats are memorialized well after their time, when the public feels it must reach back to the past to celebrate a cherished American value. "The Washington [Monument]," observes historian Robert Dallek, "was completed after the Civil War, when the national impulse was to reestablish unity, to recreate a national spirit.... The Lincoln Memorial didn't come along until the 1920s, after the passions of the Civil War had subsided. The Jefferson Memorial was not dedicated until 1943"—in the midst of World War II, when Jefferson served as a kind of avatar of democracy.

The Reagan memorialists have a similar purpose: the elevation of Reaganite political values as an explicit rebuttal to the Clinton presidency. It's no coincidence that the Ronald Reagan Legacy Project got started in 1997 and 1998, just as Bimbroglio played out; that the overweening nostalgia surrounding Reagan's birthday peaked just as Pardongate did; or that Norquist's allies include some of the sweatiest Clinton-haters in Washington. In a sense, Reagan-worship is Clinton-hating by other means—a way of relegating the Bubba years to a brief hallucination between Reagan II (Bush père) and Reagan III (Bush fils).

The difference, as the Reaganites have discovered, is that most Americans have far more nostalgia for Reagan than for Reaganism (as opposed to Clintonism, which they liked considerably more than Clinton). And, as a result, the impulse behind Reagan-worship has come almost entirely from *inside* the Beltway. Ironically, the very people who came to Washington to join Reagan in smiting the arrogant, out-of-touch, top-down liberal elite—Norquist, Hansen, Bob Barr, Dennis Hastert—have established an arrogant, out-of-touch, top-down conservative elite bent on ramming their patron saint down the country's throat. "The impulse to build [previous] memorials," Dallek says, "was the product of a long-term development of public sentiment.... What's interesting about the Reagan memorials is the extraordinary speed with which they're going about it. I mean, he's not even *dead*."

Perhaps this is why there are really only three places in America with a significant concentration of Reagan memorials: Illinois, where the dedications—the Ronald Reagan Birthplace, in Tampico; Eureka College's Reagan Physical Education Center; and so on—mostly predate Norquist's advocacy (and, in some cases, Reagan's presidency); California, where Reagan dominated state politics for nearly two

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decades; and ... Washington, D.C. There, in the cradle of big government, Reagan is now honored by both the second-largest federal building in the country (the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center) and the recently renamed Reagan National Airport.

Not satisfied with these tributes, the Reaganites want to replace Alexander Hamilton with Reagan on the $10 bill and, as Norquist puts it, "take that fascist Roosevelt off Rushmore and put Reagan on." And then there's the aforementioned Ronald Reagan Memorial Act, alias H.R. 452, sponsored by Hansen, chairman of the Resources Committee (the bill was first introduced last year as the Ronald Reagan Recognition Act by Representative Don Young, Hansen's predecessor as chairman). Never mind that the idea was opposed by the National Park Service, most historians, and both the Fine Arts and National Capital Planning Commissions—or that Reagan himself signed a bill in 1986 that prohibited anyone who hadn't been dead for more than 25 years from being memorialized on the Mall. "The only people who are really behind it," says a senior Democratic aide, "are Grover Norquist and Hansen and Young before that. There's no groundswell behind this."

PERHAPS BECAUSE OF such underwhelming support, H.R. 452 would have let Hastert and Trent Lott pick two of the three members of the proposed Ronald Reagan Memorial Commission and designate the chairman. It would also have exempted the entire process from the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which provides, among other things, that such commissions be open to the public and "fairly balanced in terms of the points of view represented." "The whole idea is to get around all of the protections, whether the process and the rules in the Congress, or the laws protecting the Mall," says Representative George Miller, until recently the committee's ranking Democrat. So far, the bill is stalled in the House, and the Bush administration has not made it a priority. "I think we're just going to rename the Mall after Reagan," grumbles Norquist. "That should take care of that."

It wouldn't be the first time the Reaganites steamrolled democracy in the Washington area. When Norquist pushed to rename Washington National Airport for Reagan back in 1997, "there was tremendous opposition," remembers Arlington County board member Chris Zimmerman, a Democrat. "This was viewed as a hostile act that was done without a single hearing, with the mail in the congressional offices going eighty percent against it." Despite the opposition, congressional Republicans—led by Barr—defeated an amendment that would have required local consent.

But the crusade isn't over yet. Last year, Young noticed that the airport's subway stop—located in Arlington and nominally under the jurisdiction of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority—was still called "National Airport." Under Metro rules, changing a station's name requires a locality to petition Metro's board of directors, and for two years the good citizens of Arlington had declined to rally to the cause. So, last October, Young submitted legislation requiring that Metro change the station's name on every sign and map in the system. Another bill, sponsored by Young and Barr, would have required Virginia, Maryland, and Washington to emblazon Reagan's name "prominently" on all signs for the airport. Young's bill hasn't passed—but, in March, Barr threatened to hold up the Metro's funding if they didn't change the signs at the airport (the Metro board meets later this week to vote on the name change). "It's unbelievable," says Zimmerman. "The sign doesn't say 'Washington National Airport.' It says 'National Airport.' It's just the shorthand that people use. You want transit signs to be short and sweet. To me, this is just amazing, especially coming from conservatives." The federal government, it seems, is not the solution to Arlington's problems. The federal government *is* the problem. ■

Nitzanim Beach Dispatch

Inner Peace

By YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

FOR FOUR DAYS during Passover, on a stretch of beach barely 18 kilometers north of the Gaza border, thousands of young Israelis with dreadlocks and shaved heads and painted faces gather to celebrate existence. They massage each other and dance to trance music and Israeli rock, whose ballads sound melancholy even when their lyrics insist on joy. They meditate on the shore, imagining expanses beyond this land of tightening siege.

They call it the Boombamela, a nonsensical name echoing an Indian religious festival, the Kumbh Mela. It is a gathering of Israel's newest tribe: the "graduates of India," as they're called, the post-army backpackers who seek respite from the Middle East in a more benign Far East. Some have become permanent wanderers, commuting between Goa's beaches and Israel in a Sabra rejection of rootedness. Here on Nitzanim Beach they have created their fantasy of an Indian village. "Chai shops"—wooden tables on the sand—offer cardamom-flavored tea. Strips of bright cloth fly over the campgrounds, flags proclaiming nothing but the delight of color.

The 1960s have come to Israel, but with a desperate edge, as if Haight-Ashbury were ten minutes from the Vietnam front. Many at the Boombamela are veterans of Israel's no-win wars in Lebanon and the territories, now army reservists, trying to forget the next call-up. Some are on active duty, arriving from nearby bases for a quick change into loose, brightly colored Indian clothes. Though the Boombamela rejects any political agenda, the message is clear: We are not a nation ready for war.

Little is forbidden here. A naked man covered with tattoos juggles burning sticks; couples make love on the beach. Drug use is widespread but discreet. Writhing around campfires to Arabic drums and long, twisted shofars, the young people recall the Israelites in the desert, before they reached Sinai to receive the Law. Children of Israel, not yet Jews.

In this place without regulations, there is one unspoken

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rule: Don't bring newspapers or pace yourself by hourly radio updates. Still, not everyone can restrain himself. A trucker named Danny keeps a radio on low volume in his tent, briefing neighboring tents about the latest shooting incidents just up the beach. "It's all going to blow up soon," he says. "And then maybe we'll have a few years of quiet until the next round."

Each war produces a new wave of seekers. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when an unprepared Israel glimpsed its own mortality, some leading bohemian artists and actors turned ultra-Orthodox. And when 39 Scud missiles fell on Tel Aviv and Haifa during the Gulf war and caused only one fatality, even many secularists felt God had once again protected Israel.

Among working-class Sephardim, the search has led to ultra-Orthodox Shas; among middle-class Ashkenazim, to New Age. In the 1990s, New Age entered the mainstream of a nation no longer certain of its basic ideals. Bookstores now feature New Age literature, and entire publishing houses are devoted to spiritual and self-help literature. Foreign teachers of Eastern mysticism draw devoted crowds; Israeli-born Zen masters and gurus are beginning to appear. Even the Boombamela is, in its way, mainstream: An advertising supplement for the festival appeared in one leading newspaper, and hundreds of families joined in.

Zionism produced two utopian waves, the early kibbutz movement and the messianic settlement movement. This may be a third. "I don't know whether we'll succeed in creating a new society," says Hagar, a kindergarten teacher. "But hatred among us and a lack of values are destroying Israel, and we have to find a better way."

In fact, Israel's New Age movement is a dual revolt—against the Judaism of the Orthodox establishment and the secularism of the Zionist founders. Many participants are experimenting with Jewish ritual, acknowledging that secular Israel's great cultural failure was abandoning religion to the rabbis rather than creating new, Israeli forms of Judaism. Indeed, New Age festivals like the Boombamela now occur on almost every Jewish holiday, filling the need to infuse the Jewish calendar with an indigenous spirituality.

The Boombamela offers a vision of an Israel that transcends rigid categories of secular and religious. A group of hippie Hasidim, followers of the late rabbi and singer Shlomo Carlebach, set up a "Synagogue of Love and Prayer" not far from the Hare Krishna tent. A band called The Steps, with both ultra-Orthodox and secular members, sings psalms set to rock music; a theater group improvises on the text of Exodus. And while in Tel Aviv police impose symbolic fines on restaurants that dare sell *hametz*—leavened products—on Passover, here bread and matzo are equally available. Michoel, a former American whose side locks merge into his long hair, just smiles at the *hametz* and the hedonism. "All I see," he says, "are beautiful Jews coming together on Passover to be free."

Despite the close quarters and long lines for food and bathrooms, festivalgoers are determined to treat each other with decency. When one young man waiting in a slow-moving line begins to shout and push, those around him respond by dancing—defying the Israeli surliness that stems from the Zionist experiment of cramming too many traumatized people into too little space, surrounded by neighbors offended by their existence. Though some find themselves glancing furtively toward Gaza or watching as air force planes pass on maneuver, they mostly manage to outwit reality. Even with the next war looming, they insist that Zionism fulfill its promise to make Jews happy. At one point, a mass chant of "Om" merges with the buzz of a jet, as if war and peace were part of a seamless illusion. ■

Paris Dispatch

Sin City

By Peter Maass

"I represent the Mitterrand name," the former French president's son said unhappily as we lunched not long ago at Les Comediens, a Paris restaurant near his lawyer's office. Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, 54, who has the long cheeks and gravelly voice of his father, spends a lot of time with his lawyer these days—enduring an investigation by the government over which his father, the late Francois Mitterrand, once presided like a king.

For much of his father's tenure, Jean-Christophe headed the "Cellule Africaine," overseeing France's murky relations with its former colonies in Africa. His nickname, "Father Told Me," referred to the phrase he reportedly invoked to remind visitors of his unique access to the sphinx-like president. But his father died of cancer in 1996, and French prosecutors have become far less deferential since. So it was that, on December 1, a team of French policemen barged into Jean-Christophe's bedroom at dawn, stood by while he dressed, and seized financial documents, appointment books, party invitations, and anything else that might relate to illegal weapons-trafficking in Africa. "There's a lot of madness in France now," Mitterrand muses. "There have been a lot of political affairs, you know."

Indeed, France's newest fashion is corruption. It's impossible to read a newspaper or watch television without coming across news that another politician or businessman has been arrested or questioned about (select one or more of the following): bribery, fraud, perjury, theft, tax evasion, abuse of influence, and so on. Once upon a time, the French gazed at the scandals across the Atlantic and muttered about Americans' puritanical desire to punish politicians for typical human frailties. The French were far more sophisticated; they regarded their tolerance for political mischief as a sign of maturity.

The current wave of corruption scandals, however, serves notice that the French are, once more, following the path charted by their cultural nemesis. The reporters of *Le Monde* appear to be taking orders from Bob Woodward, and the

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folks at the Palais de Justice look like Ken Starrs on the Seine. Even the terminology is Americanized: The scandal that embroils Jean-Christophe is called "Angolagate."

The call to account might have begun two decades ago if Francois Mitterrand, elected in 1981 as the first socialist president of the Fifth Republic, had honored campaign promises to govern in a more democratic, more transparent fashion than his conservative predecessors. But he quickly adopted their imperial style. Fourteen years passed. By the time Mitterrand left office in 1995, the grand questions of past decades—the cold war, Franco-German relations—had been settled. The behind-closed-doors privileges the political elite had enjoyed, almost as emergency powers during decades of threats to French interests, real and perceived, seemed unnecessary. It was time for France to become a normal country, and that meant, among other things, that politicians would not be treated as untouchable mandarins. The current division of power—a conservative president and socialist prime minister—hastened matters by diluting any single party's political control over prosecutors.

This turn of events has not been welcomed at the Palais de l'Elysée, where President Jacques Chirac refuses to answer prosecutors' questions about the Boss Tweed way in which he conducted himself as mayor of Paris. (A former aide accused Chirac of being present during the handover of a suitcase filled with $700,000 in kickbacks; Chirac dismissed the charge as "an abracadabra tale.") Chirac's handpicked successor at City Hall, now former Mayor Jean Tiberi, is being probed for arranging kickbacks, doling out city-owned apartments to friends and family, and placing political supporters on voting rolls even though they didn't live in the city or, in some cases, were dead.

BUT THESE SCANDALS are stale baguettes compared with the trial of Roland Dumas, former foreign minister and former president of the Constitutional Court. The 78-year-old was tried earlier this year for allegedly accepting bribes, including handmade shoes and antique statues, from his younger mistress, Christine Deviers-Joncour, who was on the payroll of Elf, a state-owned oil company. At the heart of the case—a verdict is expected in May—is the accusation that Dumas arranged the lucrative Elf job, which included several million dollars in salary, bonuses, and expenses, even though, according to prosecutors, Deviers-Joncour didn't do much except sleep with her minister.

Dumas has denied the charges, telling the judge, with great indignation, "You cannot buy a statesman with a pair of shoes." He threatened unspecified measures of revenge against "certain prosecutors" and suggested one of them had been a Nazi. His petulance is understandable: In the good old days, who would have cared if a minister placed his mistress on a government payroll?

And, just when it seemed things couldn't get any juicier, Alfred Sirven, a top Elf official who allegedly funneled the money to Dumas's mistress, was nabbed in a Philippine villa with a Filipina girlfriend several decades his junior. When police burst in, Sirven opened his cell phone, extracted its microchip, and swallowed it. With developments like that, France's TV news has started sounding like an outlandish soap opera in which viewers learn what suave Roland really promised to mistress Christine, who is mad at Alfred for not defending her honor. As the woman who cut my hair one day remarked, "It's really like 'Dallas,' isn't it?" Watergate was dull by comparison.

Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, however, has not enjoyed the show. Three weeks after police ruined his sleep, he was arrested, driven to a nineteenth-century prison, and thrown into a cell next to a Nazi-era war criminal. He remained there for three weeks, until his mother paid his $725,000 bail ("ransom," she called it). His alleged crime was splashed across the front page of virtually every French newspaper: that he accepted $1.8 million from a shadowy arms merchant for facilitating an illegal deal in which $563 million in weaponry was sold to Angola. Mitterrand says the payments were for consultations on an oil deal.

As Mitterrand progressed from one course to another during our leisurely lunch, sipping his way through several glasses of Bordeaux, he recalled his first encounter with the prosecutor who signed his arrest warrant.

"Name of father?" the prosecutor asked.

"There are sixty million people in France who know the answer!" Mitterrand's lawyer objected.

The prosecutor said nothing as he typed into his computer: "F-R-A-N-C-O-I-S."

I asked Mitterrand what went through his mind as he was shipped off to jail.

"Nothing," he replied. "You are in shock." ■

Tetovo Dispatch

Borderlines

By JOSHUA HAMMER *and* ZORAN CIRJAKOVIC

HASSAN ZELILI HAS lived through a nightmare. The deputy mayor of the village of Selce, perched in the rugged hills overlooking Tetovo, Zelili found himself trapped in the crossfire when ethnic Albanian rebels took up arms in his hamlet last month. First, Macedonian police cut off Selce's electricity and telephone service; then they blocked the road to town and began lobbing 120-millimeter tank shells into the town square. Twenty-five of Zelili's relatives fled their houses during the bombardment and took refuge in a back room in his compound. On the night the Macedonian government gave the rebels an ultimatum—lay down your weapons or face a full-scale assault—Zelili sat in his living room, sipping chicken soup by candlelight. Was he angry at the rebels for bringing such trouble to his village? Not at all. "I'll stay here and die with

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the fighters if I have to," he vowed. "The government says we have equal rights, but Macedonia is a false democracy."

Zelili's not alone. Macedonia's Albanians have largely embraced the rebellion that sprang up last month in the hills above Tetovo—which is strange, because Macedonia's Albanians have never had it so good. Since Arben Xhaferi's Democratic Party of Albanians joined a coalition government in the fall of 1998, discrimination against Albanians has declined dramatically. Albanians now boast significant representation in Macedonia's police force, officer corps, and local government; they've won the right to teach their children in the Albanian language and essentially carved out an independent fiefdom in western Macedonia with Tetovo as its unofficial capital. But those gains aren't enough, because the conflict isn't really about human rights or democracy anymore; it's about pent-up rage. After decades of repression at the hands of the Slavic majority, an overwhelming number of Albanians in Macedonia simply want out. Even if that means war.

THE RADICALIZATION OF Macedonia's Albanian minority—said to number anywhere between 23 percent and 40 percent of the population—is the direct consequence of decades of misrule. Under Marshal Tito, ethnic Albanians across Yugoslavia faced rampant, institutionalized discrimination. Many were denied government jobs, which, in a Communist country, formed the surest path to middle-class existence (such as it was), and refused entrance to universities because of their ethnicity. In Macedonia, this discrimination fed dreams of an ethnically pure nation carved out of the western part of the country—what locals called "Ilirida"—and joined with the Albanian parts of surrounding states. After Macedonian independence in 1991, ethnic Albanians established an underground university in Tetovo modeled on the one in Kosovo's capital, Pristina—right down to the map of "Greater Albania" on the wall of the administrative building. Police responded by jailing the university's founders and beating and harassing students. Relations between ethnic Albanians and the Slavic majority only grew worse over the subsequent years, particularly following the Albanian rebellion across the border in Kosovo in the late '90s. Macedonia's Slavs believed that the Kosovars' struggle was the first phase of a plan to create a pan-Albanian nation encompassing a large swath of Macedonian territory. Albanians, said the Slavs, were a "wild tribe" breeding at a high rate in order to lay claim to as much land as possible; the only solution was to drive them across the mountains into Kosovo. Macedonia's animosity toward its Albanian minority was so pronounced that it gave rise to a Balkan aphorism: "Cut a Macedonian's belly open and three Serbs will pop out."

But all this began to change following the fall 1998 national elections. That year the Internal Macedonian National Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party of Macedonian Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) entered into a coalition with the Democratic Party of Albanians, led by Xhaferi. In return for Xhaferi's support, Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski essentially offered Albanians their own turf in the western, predominantly Albanian part of the country. And while some Macedonian laws remain discriminatory—forcing Albanians to use the Cyrillic alphabet in all official communications, for example—the de facto changes have been enormous. In 1993 ethnic Albanians held just 3 percent of jobs in the public sector; today the number exceeds 10 percent. Tens of thousands of Albanian schoolchildren are now educated in their own language, and an Albanian-language university has been established in Tetovo. There are 64 Albanian-language newspapers and magazines, scores of radio stations, and four hours per day of Albanian-language programming on the second state TV channel; a third, all-Albanian-language channel is in the planning stages. Three of the country's top seven generals are ethnic Albanian, along with five of 15 government ministers. Albanian mayors now represent 26 of Macedonia's 123 cities and towns.

BUT, AS FAST as the improvements have come, they haven't come nearly fast enough to keep pace with the radicalization of Macedonia's Albanians. In recent months, Xhaferi's party has lost ground to a new, extremist Albanian party that supports total separation from Macedonia. Even the unprecedented concessions Xhaferi wrested from the Macedonian majority are widely seen as craven compromises. The establishment of the Tetovo university, for example, provoked more opposition than applause. Because Macedonia law doesn't allow state-funded Albanian-language colleges, Xhaferi settled for a private institution, with funding to be provided by the European Union and the United States. But the compromise backfired: It reminded ethnic Albanians that their tax dollars fund Macedonian-language universities but not Albanian ones.

Many of Macedonia's ethnic Albanians seem determined to believe the worst about their fate, even when the facts suggest otherwise. "Eighty percent of Albanians are unemployed in this country," a pensioner in the Albanian village of Poroj said. But that's unlikely. While there's no question that Albanians still don't have the same job opportunities as Macedonians in the civil service, they're generally better off financially—a result of being forced into private businesses or employment as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) in Switzerland and Germany. Yes, Cyrillic remains Macedonia's official alphabet and Orthodox Christianity its state religion; but throughout western Macedonia you can barely find a word written in Cyrillic, much less an Orthodox church. And, while hard-liners say Macedonian authorities have effectively emasculated ethnic Albanians in local government, there's little evidence that that's true.

Some Albanian leaders are pushing for a deal with the Macedonian majority in which the Albanians would receive a "federalized" state—an autonomous territory in the west that might later be given the right to secede. But the Macedonians aren't likely to go that far. Macedonian politicians know that federalization in the Balkans is a recipe for a breakup—as the independence of Croatia and Macedonia from Yugoslavia in 1991 and the current secessionist drive in Montenegro make clear. The problem is that, ultimately, it was this wish for independence—and not complaints about discrimination or unequal representation—that drove sup-

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port for the short-lived Albanian uprising, which started in late February but broke out in earnest around Tetovo in March.

Zelili, for example, insists that the goal of the Albanian population is merely "more rights within a united Macedonia." But, pressed to define what those rights would be, he blurts out, "We are all Albanian people, but history is history. We are divided into four states. That shouldn't be." As long as that sentiment remains, the fighting that rocked the hills around Tetovo last month is almost certain to return. ■

Why the right backed Bush on China.

Cavemen

By LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

"CONSERVATIVE ANTI-CHINA hard-liners," "the extreme right," "the conservative wing of the GOP"—these were just a few of the catchphrases the media employed to describe the "pressure" to bash China that President Bush withstood after Beijing's seizure of a Navy EP-3 and its crew. "HOW BUSH HAD TO CALM HAWKS IN DEVISING A RESPONSE TO CHINA," teased the headline of a *New York Times* article that identified, well, not a single hawk who required calming. Similarly, the *Times* editorial page alerted readers to "grumbling from the activist conservative wing of the GOP" and warned that "the China-bashers are not likely to be silent"—but, again, neglected to say exactly which of the right's "China-bashers" the editors had in mind.

That's because there weren't any. With the exception of a small band of former John McCain supporters—who hardly constitute the conservative wing of the GOP—the right has yet to utter a peep about the Bush team's apologetics. On the contrary, the fact that the United States apologized for something it never did and thanked China for seeing "to the well-being of our crew" has earned a steady stream of plaudits from the same conservatives who scored President Clinton for bowing to Beijing. The "safety and security" of the American people, Senator Jesse Helms declared seven months ago, "will be ensured ultimately not by appeasement, not by the hope of trade at any cost, but by dealing with Communist China without selling out the very moral and spiritual principles that made America great." But when the Bush team did exactly that, Helms could only gush about how "extremely proud of President Bush" he was. Oliver North called the cave "a masterful job," while *The Washington Times* spun the story in ways that would have made the editors of the *People's Daily* blush: "BUSH DOES NOT GIVE IN TO APOLOGY DEMANDS" and "BUSH LAUDED FOR TACTICS IN RESOLVING STANDOFF," its front-page headlines instructed. Behind closed doors, conservative activists sang the same tune. At the weekly kibitzing sessions organized by right-wing strategist Grover Norquist and routinely attended by administration officials, the verdict was unanimous: "Everyone was supportive," says Norquist aide Chad Cowan. "There was no criticism."

What little conservative criticism there was came almost exclusively from one source—*The Weekly Standard*. When the administration began its hourly expressions of contrition, *Weekly Standard* editors William Kristol and Robert Kagan composed an editorial stating the obvious: China had "brought the United States to one knee," and the administration had bent willingly. For reasons having to do less with its substance than with the fact it represented the only deviation from the GOP's official line, the Sunday talk shows pounced on the editorial, presenting it to administration officials as proof of grumbling on the right. Secretary of State Colin Powell responded that the piece was "absurd." His deputy, Richard Armitage—who seemed to forget the Kristol-sponsored letter he and half the Bush team had signed two years ago demanding that the Clinton administration take a firmer stance toward China—called it "nonsense." Vice President Dick Cheney said it was "disreputable."

Professional conservatives weren't nearly so diplomatic. "President Bush is coming under a furious, and utterly unjustified, assault from conservative intellectuals [at *The Weekly Standard*] concerning his handling of the China incident," charged former Newt Gingrich spokesman and *Washington Times* columnist Tony Blankley. Echoing that appraisal, *The American Spectator*'s editor-in-chief, R. Emmet Tyrrell Jr., inveighed against "the purple passions of Winston Spencer Kristol and the country's other hawks," who, he sneered, "have all gone back to their country homes to sip brandies and lament the appeasers in the White House." Columnist Robert Novak, Newt Gingrich, right-wing pundit Laura Ingraham, and a parade of lesser conservatives lined up to excoriate *The Weekly Standard*'s heresy as well.

Why has the right been silent about the letter of the two "very sorrys"? Many conservatives argue that, with the EP-3 crew back on American soil, the Bush team will now exact a steep price from the Chinese. Sure it will. Would the White House use trade as a lever to punish China? Absolutely not, say administration officials. Would Bush move to quash Beijing's Olympics bid? Probably not. Would he sell Taiwan the sophisticated weapons systems it requested? Not really—after all, that might provoke Beijing. True, the administration adopted a harder line this week. Only it was against Israel.

The Hudson Institute's Marshall Wittman, for one, says the silence of his fellow conservatives derives partly from the fact that the movement is "awash in corporate money and hostage to K Street." And it's certainly true, as John B. Judis demonstrated in these pages last week, that corporate America has had a narcotic influence on the right's perception of China (see "Sullied Heritage," April 23). Indeed, what George Will once said of American executives who thirsted to do business with the Soviet Union—that they loved commerce more than they loathed communism—applies increasingly to the very conservatives who once leveled the charge.

But it wasn't business interests that silenced the right last week. It was politics. Having persuaded themselves in South Carolina that Bush was one of their own and having invested

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so much in him, conservatives, after eight years in the wilderness, have embraced a see-no-evil strategy that all but precludes criticism of the Oval Office. Hence, White House aides spoon-fed pro-Bush (and anti-Kristol) talking points to conservative editorial writers and activists, which the latter promptly regurgitated into the public square. Hence, commentators on the right satisfied themselves that, because the letter never used the word "apology," it couldn't have been one. Much of that commentary, indeed, depicted the Hainan seizure less as a test of American resolve than a test of a far higher principle: loyalty to the Bush team. Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity found it "amazing that some of our conservative brethren—most of them supported John McCain—are the first ones hoping George Bush fails." Reading from the same script, Ingraham demanded of Kristol at an American Enterprise Institute event, "When you call President Bush's response to China weak, do you think that's really positive in [terms] of uniting Republicans behind any one particular policy?" After all, "a weakened President Bush is exactly what Democrats want."

Alas, a weakened America is exactly what the Chinese want. And during the Hainan crisis it became clear which of the two possibilities unsettles the right more. "If this had been Clinton, we would've torn him a new asshole," says one conservative activist. "But Bush has earned a lot of capital on domestic issues, staffing, and things conservatives care about, so he's earned the running room." That's one way of putting it. Another is that America's conservative movement has lost the capacity to distinguish between its parochial interests and the nation's. Bush has shown himself to be "the very opposite of an appeaser," Blankley reasons. "He is fighting against public opinion for more oil drilling in America. He stubbornly refuses to yield a single dollar of his $1.6 trillion tax cut. He nominated, and saw to confirmation, the controversial appointment of Sen. John Ashcroft as attorney general." But is it really necessary to point out that standing up to environmentalists isn't quite the same as standing up to Communist China? Apparently so, since the right's reflexive support for Bush's China policy revealed a movement that has surrendered its capacity to think critically and has become captive to the very forces against which postwar conservatism once defined itself—the GOP functionaries, finely tailored businessmen, and Henry Kissingers whose ideological preferences consist of cash and power. Right-wing hard-liners? If only. ■

Why too much due process is a dangerous thing.

Law and Disorder

By JONATHAN RAUCH

IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, I was small and got picked on. I thought one of the bigger boys might grab my wallet and run, so I punched an eyelet in the leather and attached the wallet to a loop on my belt by means of a chain. Nerdy, yes, but not, in those days, a weapons-policy offense requiring mandatory suspension.

Times have changed. Last September, Ashley Smith, an eleven-year-old student at Garrett Middle School in suburban Atlanta, brought to school a Tweety Bird wallet to which she had attached her keys with a ten-inch chain. The school awarded her a ten-day suspension for violating its zero-tolerance weapons policy. According to the Associated Press, "School officials said Ashley and her parents ... knew chains were banned." Ashley was baffled. "It's only a little chain, and I don't think it can really hurt anyone," she said. Well, rules are rules.

Is it just me, or are we reading more and more of this stuff? Last year, four kindergartners in New Jersey received three-day suspensions for pretending their fingers were guns and

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"shooting" at each other while playing cops and robbers. ("We're very firm on weapons and threats," said the local superintendent.) Then there was the twelve-year-old girl expelled in Omaha, Nebraska, last year when she brought a pair of blunt-edge safety scissors to school. (The expulsion has since been overturned.) Not to mention the elementary school in Annapolis, Maryland, that in March banned tag because it violated the "no touching" policy. Or the spate of suspensions of elementary school children who bring nail clippers to class. And on and on.

You can find lots of explanations for these kinds of legalistic irrationalities. You could say schools are haunted by the specter of Columbine. That schools are terrified of lawsuits. Or that, in a country of more than 100,000 schools, there will always be excesses. On all counts, you would be right. Still, a society's excesses and absurdities say a lot about its obsessions and dysfunctions. And, these days, those obsessions and dysfunctions frequently stem from a mindless legalism that is insinuating itself into every pore of daily life, often demolishing a quieter, suppler kind of law—Hidden Law. Once this mindless legalism was merely a nuisance. Now it is becoming a menace to everyday decency in American life.

In recent years, economists and other social scientists have begun paying attention to the remarkable efficiency of the unwritten customs, informal understandings, and other social codes—codes that everyone understands and no one writes down. In his 1991 book *Order Without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes*, Robert Ellickson of Yale Law School carefully mapped how, in Shasta County, California, ranchers developed informal rules to settle problems regarding trespassing cattle. These norms, Ellickson found, were much more important to the ranchers than were statutory laws about private property; in fact, many ranchers didn't even know what the statutes said.

Such tacit codes are most conspicuous in the economic sphere, where they avert or settle property disputes, and in the honor codes that allocate communal duties (for instance, serving on a condominium board). Coexisting with those are what you might call "Main Street Codes"—the rules governing how "decent" people behave in a civic context. ("Decent" people help the cops, welcome new neighbors, don't let their lawns or kids run wild.) Then there are the much less talked-about, but no less important, "Old Wives' Rules" that regulate conduct at a more personal level. Written on the bones of every hausfrau or yenta, these rules—such as the requirement that a man marry a woman if he gets her pregnant—are the main regulators of love and romance.

Underlying all of those are the craftily balanced regimes of hypocrisy that dissolve the most insoluble conflicts, the issues of deepest moral disagreement: what I call Hidden Law. "Law" because these codes are as widely observed as rules in a statute book; "Hidden" because to make them work people must often pretend they don't exist. The trick with Hidden Law is to make social bargains whose terms include an agreement to deny that there is any such bargain.

Consider the problem of assisted suicide. Murdering people at the end of life is intolerable, and helping them kill themselves is perilously close to murder. But requiring them and their kin to endure agony all the way to the inevitable end is also intolerable. What to do? For centuries, Hidden Law allowed a doctor, in consultation with the patient or the family or both, to quietly help a sufferer die. It worked because, formally speaking, what happened was simply a natural death. There were knowing nods, whispered hallway conversations, bedside understandings. But there was nothing to prosecute or absolve. Everyone involved knew what had happened. Everyone also knew the importance of pretending that nothing had happened.

Almost as sensitive, and much more common, is the problem of adultery. And here Hidden Law is at its most elegant. Adultery is socially dangerous. But, while you don't want to condone it, you can't eradicate it. The answer is a Chinese box of rules. For public consumption—that is, what we tell the children—the rule is: Never, never, never! But the real rule is: If you absolutely must fool around, keep it out of sight. Within that rule is a still more subtle one: If you pretend not to do it, we'll pretend not to notice. At some point, of course, word may seep out. Then what? Here yet another rule kicks in: If the cuckolded spouse either doesn't know or pretends not to know, then no hanky-panky is going on—no sirree!

You have here a magnificent contraption. It reduces adultery by requiring that it be kept out of sight, which greatly inconveniences adulterers. Better still, it empowers cuckolded spouses—especially women—by letting them be the ones to decide just how much hanky-panky is too much. If a woman wants to tolerate her husband's infidelity for the sake of marriage or children, she can do so without losing face. But when enough is enough, she can blow the whistle and the shocked and amazed community can aver that it has never seen such a scoundrel as her husband. That gives her a weapon and some power to set limits. Not even James Madison could have invented a better set of checks and balances.

Similarly, long before there was Comstockery or Andrea Dworkin, there were dirty books and magazines and peep shows. Some people deplored them, some people consumed them, and many people deplored them while consuming them. This was possible because Hidden Law kept pornography out of sight: downtown, near Skid Row, under the counter, and so on. Everyone knew smut was there, and everyone pretended not to have seen it. Randy boys got hold of it but kept it hidden; adults, perhaps smiling inwardly, pretended to believe that boys didn't get hold of it, so they wouldn't have to take it away.

This pretense was hypocritical and very useful. The requirement that porn stay where you could plausibly claim never to see it amounted to a social truce. Libertines agreed not to confront bluenoses with smut; in exchange, bluenoses promised not to go digging around in the affairs of libertines. Naturally, both parties would have vigorously denied there was any such deal. Which is precisely why it worked.

In many areas, Hidden Law and Formal Law coexist, provided that cops and lawyers and politicians stand discreetly aside and let Hidden Law work where it can. Pornography is one such area; abortion, up to a point, is another. State

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regulation of abortion is probably inevitable, but today, in the post-*Roe* v. *Wade* world, we are so used to thinking of abortion in legalistic terms—as either murder or a right—that we forget abortion can be something else altogether: a secret. For many years, and to some extent even today, Hidden Law regulated abortion by saying you could have one, but people shouldn't find out about it. I am told that a middle-aged relative of mine had an abortion as a teenager, but this is a family secret, which I therefore do not know.

Keeping abortion out of sight and mildly stigmatized is a good way to keep it legal, available, rare, and morally disreputable. I grant you this is an uneasy compromise, unsatisfying if you believe abortion is either murder or a civil right. But for pro-lifers it is better than public subsidies and TV ads for clinics, and for pro-choicers it is better than bans and coat hangers, and for the broad middle it allows life to flow peaceably around an otherwise intractable moral conflict.

Where Formal Law is all thumbs, Hidden Law often works wonders. Universities have always had speech codes; the only innovation was to write them down. In the old days, the rule for insults and epithets was: Don't say obnoxious or abusive things, but if you do, say them only rarely and in a fit of temper or drunkenness so you can apologize and we can all pretend you didn't really mean it, though we all know you did. Only if your obnoxiousness crossed an invisible but decidedly real line did the community hear or see it, in which case you got a talking-to, or even got kicked out. And before speech codes came along in the 1980s and '90s, American university campuses were not known as places where the slinging of vicious slurs was a big problem. Nor were they known as places where being charged with so-called "discriminatory verbal conduct" triggered months-long investigations, draconian discipline often meted out with a presumption of guilt, federal court cases, and regular campus uproars.

From adultery to pornography to hateful speech, Hidden Law sustained exquisite pretenses and operated with miraculous finesse. There was a time when an entire churchful of people could manage not to see that a bride was eight months pregnant. Jeffrey Rosen, in his perceptive book *The Unwanted Gaze*, points out that privacy in any dense social environment is not just the right to shut your blinds, although it certainly is that; it is also the expectation that, up to a certain point, other people won't look, even if you happen to leave the blinds open. Hidden Law adds a less conspicuous but equally essential element to privacy: the tacit understanding that those who do look will pretend not to see. This is something of an importance instinctively known to every parent who has ever committed the sort of embarrassing interruption that we used to call, in my teenage days, a "walk-in." Without Hidden Law, life in society becomes like the home life of a 15-year-old boy whose parents never stop shouting, "Billy! What are you doing in there?"

Hidden Law has always had enemies, notably among puritans and certain types of social reformers who believed it was their duty to point out what others pretended not to see. But the puritans and social reformers often functioned as useful, even essential critics of the Main Street Codes of their time. Hidden Law, after all, can be as unjust or ill-founded as any other law. Think of the ancient and well-intentioned, but misguided and inhumane, social rule that governed homosexuality. If gays pretended to be straight, straight people pretended to believe them. Any homosexual American, including me, will affirm that this Hidden Law—otherwise known as the closet—was soul-destroying. Moreover, hypocrisy for its own sake, unmoored from any useful social compact, is merely corrupt. Up to a point, therefore, puritans and reformers can strengthen Hidden Law by updating it and keeping it humane.

Only recently has a really deadly enemy emerged: a systematic ideology that is equipped with powerful institutional support and has the effect, usually unintended, of damaging or demolishing Hidden Law in encounter after encounter. That ideology is Bureaucratic Legalism: the belief that the way to settle practically every conflict is through an elaborate and highly articulated set of procedures.

"Belief" is the key word in that sentence. Law itself is not the problem. On the contrary, the principles of Western law—due process, transparent rules set down in advance, equal application of the rules to all comers, adversarial representation, and so on—are among civilization's greatest triumphs. The problem comes when people decide that if a little legal process in some situations is a good thing, a great deal of legal process in every situation must be a lot better.

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Then you get Bureaucratic Legalism: the notion that if you get the process right, the outcome must also be right. Outside of the legal system, people realized years ago that red tape, in the form of rules and hearings and paperwork, does not ensure sensible outcomes. Among government reformers, it is now gospel that outputs, not inputs, are the best measures of success. Defenders of Bureaucratic Legalism, on the other hand, still seem to think that more discovery, more pleadings, and more layers of appeal will deliver better justice. They seem confident that the system is rational so long as all the rules are being followed, and all the i's and t's are meticulously dotted and crossed.

I recognize that there are still lawyers and judges who find ways to do the sensible thing, even if that means leaving some i undotted or risking being overturned on appeal. The pity is that law students are so often taught that cutting through red tape to reach some imperfect but reasonable resolution is naughty, like cheating on your exams. The greater pity is that law schools do not generally teach that there are many conflicts for which Bureaucratic Legalism is unsuitable. Like all bureaucratic processes, Bureaucratic Legalism is generally slow, cumbersome, expensive, inflexible, and over-centralized. In fact, if you think about most of the moral conflicts that arise between humans day to day, Bureaucratic Legalism is unsuitable for the vast majority of them.

Worse, Bureaucratic Legalism has trouble stopping itself from sliding toward excess. Bureaucratic Legalism is, to begin with, generally oblivious to the existence of Hidden Law; or, on the rare occasion where it does notice Hidden Law, it regards it as hopelessly inadequate to cope with complicated modern problems. Where it sees no existing formal rules, it strives to make some. Where it sees existing rules applied sporadically or inconsistently or hypocritically, it strives for uniformity and consistency. You could call this the "zero-tolerance" problem. A kindergarten kiss is an "unwanted advance" and is therefore treated as sexual harassment. Squirt guns are guns and therefore violate weapons policies. Nurofen, the over-the-counter decongestant, contains a stimulant, and therefore a Romanian gymnast who takes two pills for a head cold must be stripped of her Olympic gold medal for using a banned drug.

IT'S TEMPTING TO see such excesses as flukes. But Bureaucratic Legalism, like all outcome-blind bureaucratic ideologies, pushes inexorably toward extremes. It cannot, by its nature, comprehend such rules as: "Up to a reasonable point, targets of slurs are responsible for swallowing their pride and getting on with life." Or: "Up to another reasonable point, if targets of slurs punch their tormentors in the nose, authorities will pretend not to notice." Or: "Beyond that point, if the authorities must notice, they will do something that seems reasonable, which they'll make up as they go along based on what they know of the situation and the characters of the people involved." To Bureaucratic Legalism, those sorts of rules are intolerable. They are "arbitrary and capricious," or "above the law," or "taking the law into your own hands."

Legalists, if they notice Hidden Law at all, sometimes say they are merely supplementing it. Often, however, their intrusion is crippling. Formal Law tends to block the cooperation and reconciliation that are essential to Hidden Law. If I call you a nasty name in the dorm and you complain to the dean, I'll worry about being keelhauled in a harassment proceeding, so I may say, "Talk to my lawyer" instead of "Oops, I'm sorry." In universities with speech codes, students accused of verbal harassment have learned that apologies will be used against them. Meanwhile, the rules themselves grow ever more complex and unwieldy as administrators and lawyers and legislators try to cover their posteriors by writing rules for every situation. When proliferating bureaucratic rules magnify conflict and block conciliation, they give rise to what is, in effect, antisocial law.

Daily life in a dense and diverse society is full of moral disputes and interpersonal collisions. *Civilized* life must be reasonably free of the fear that these everyday disputes and collisions may, at any moment and for no clear reason, suddenly explode into intolerable ordeals. In that respect, the world of hair-trigger speech codes and zero-tolerance school rules is a good deal less civilized than the world of genteel hypocrisy.

NOWHERE WAS THIS more apparent than in the Monica Lewinsky affair, which represented, in many respects, the outbreak of open warfare between Bureaucratic Legalism and Hidden Law. There is no question that Formal Law behaved during the affair as it was required to behave, according to its own lights. Under a provision of a law called the Violence Against Women Act—which President Clinton himself had signed—a plaintiff in a sexual harassment lawsuit was empowered to make extensive inquiries into the defendant's sexual history. And, under other laws, defendants are required to answer court-sanctioned inquiries truthfully. So, as far as Formal Law was concerned, a prosecutor was duty-bound to investigate credible allegations of lawbreaking by the president. End of story.

Yet the public was deeply and unremittingly hostile to Kenneth Starr's investigation. Indeed, the public rallied to Clinton's side. Bill Bennett and other conservatives suggested that the public, battered by decades of post-'60s cultural relativism, had grown corrupt. But the opposite was true: The public was desperately clinging to Hidden Law—to ancient norms of bourgeois decency—in the face of a frontal onslaught by Formal Law.

Remember, under the Main Street Code, if a man commits adultery and his wife either doesn't know or pretends not to know, the rest of the world's duty is absolutely clear: Shut up. When Gary Hart was confronted with adultery charges in 1987, his wife denied them and added, "In all honesty, if it doesn't bother me, I don't think it ought to bother anyone else." Everyone knew the rules. But, in the Lewinsky case, the law not only insisted on learning what went on, it insisted on penetrating every traditional veil of privacy and then broadcasting its findings to the world. The public saw this kind of inquiry as antisocial, even barbaric. And the public was right.

But the public's view found no political champions. Although liberals defended Clinton, they said not a word

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against the Violence Against Women Act and the rules of evidence and the sexual harassment jurisprudence that had thrust the prosecutor into Clinton's sex life. Liberals, after all, had promoted those laws—in part because many liberals view Main Street Codes as hypocritical and repressive.

More interesting, and perhaps more disappointing, was the conservative reaction. Social conservatives faced a painful choice. Because the Violence Against Women Act and its kin were already on the books, conservatives could be for a decent hypocrisy or they could be for law and order, but they could not be for both. And they were not about to let liberals get away with breaking the intrusive laws that liberals had themselves passed. Nor could conservatives sound as though they were making excuses for adultery. So conservatives were cornered into stridently advocating zero tolerance and legal formalism—never mind that, by any traditional conservative reckoning of law's proper limits, the law was way out of bounds when it demanded to know exactly what Clinton had done sexually and with whom. Thus Bennett and his allies ended up attacking the public for clinging, in true conservative fashion, to a deeper, older, wiser law.

The result was the height of perversity. By effectively making Hidden Law illegal in the Paula Jones case, Bureaucratic Legalism blocked all of Hidden Law's traditional stratagems for tiptoeing around moral conflict; then, by making confession and apology legally dangerous in the Monica Lewinsky affair, Bureaucratic Legalism blocked all Hidden Law's traditional stratagems for conciliation. Hidden Law's every move was checkmated in the name of laws that accomplished … what? For the most part, not even the lawyers bothered to defend the law's conduct as sensible or wise. "Rules are rules," they shrugged in good bureaucratic fashion. "The law is the law. The consequences aren't our problem." No wonder the public was enraged.

To this day, no major constituency—except perhaps the vast, unorganized public—wants to correct the laws that brought about the Lewinsky fiasco. Conservatives just hope there will be no more Clintons, while liberals hope there will be no more Starrs. Meanwhile, on a thousand smaller and less visible fronts, the war between Hidden Law and Formal Law continues. I know a young man—I'll call him Peter—who came from his native Hong Kong last year to study at an American high school. Peter's English was not too good, and his knowledge of American sensitivities was imperfect, and soon he found himself teased by another boy who loved to mess up Peter's designer hair. They had a tussle. Then, in an e-mail to a friend, Peter said he would "kill" this boy the next time the boy touched his hair. The e-mail was reported to the school, and the school warned Peter, which was fine. And then the other boy's parents filed formal charges against Peter and demanded that a court expel him from the school. Suddenly Peter and his aunt and uncle were being served documents and dealing with lawyers and being summoned to court. Peter went back to Hong Kong. In a sense, I suppose, he got his American education.

When Bureaucratic Legalism insinuates itself into hair-mussing spats between boys, it almost automatically degenerates into a baffling legal maximalism in which one side pulls out all the stops to accuse and the other pulls out all the other stops to defend. If you want deterrence, you will certainly get it this way; but zero tolerance and its like inspire fear at the expense of common sense and flexibility. Much too often, Bureaucratic Legalism defines fairness in terms of remote and often mutually contradictory rules, instead of through local decision-making by quiet councils of family, teachers, peers, and community.

For many years, conservatives have crusaded against the doctrine of bureaucratic government, which is, in a phrase: "You've got a problem? We've got a program." Even many liberals, if they think about it, will agree that conservatism has helped keep government out of trouble by curtailing its excesses and forcing it to answer tough, critical questions. But communitarians have yet to form any equivalent political constituency against the imperialism of Bureaucratic Legalism, which says, in a phrase: "You've got a problem? We've got a process."

It is true that Bureaucratic Legalism provokes more and more grumbling and ridicule and charges of "political correctness." Every time the wires report a story about a kindergartner charged with sexual harassment, people roll their eyes and groan. But these are feckless mutterings and ad hoc defenses. In respectable circles, Bureaucratic Legalism is still too often viewed as the only respectable alternative—and certainly better than "doing nothing," which is all that advocates of Hidden Law, if there are any, seem to propose.

How do you bolster an embattled social system that is supposed to stay out of sight? How do you persuade lawyers that the law's next big project should be to sit down and shut up? Some of the legal reforms that people talk about in other contexts (loser-pays provisions, reasonable limits on damages, and so on) might help drive people back to Hidden Law to resolve conflicts. And it would not be hard, in principle, to end the rhetorical free ride enjoyed by advocates of laws like the Violence Against Women Act. All that is required is that privacy advocates and communitarians holler publicly instead of just grumbling to themselves the next time Formal Law pokes its big nose into yet another intimate crevice.

Most important, though, is just to start noticing what's going on. Hidden Law is like water or air: Everyone takes it for granted until it is no longer reliably there. Then people start paying attention, and eventually, as the quality of life declines, they act. When I was a teenager, in the 1970s, respectable people believed that regulation was the solution to every economic problem; today pretty much everyone understands that markets can take only so much, and the debate is about how much. When I was a teenager, respectable people believed divorce was a free lunch for troubled families; now staying together is fashionable, and the divorce rate has come down. Miss Manners did wonders for etiquette just by reminding us why it matters. Something like that may be true of Hidden Law as well: Just talking about it, just noticing it—always in the abstract, of course, never in the particular (I didn't see anything, did you?)—is the beginning of bringing it back to life. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Stages of Mastery

POLITICAL THRILLERS COME in two kinds. (To speak only of well-made ones: the others don't signify.) In the first kind, the intrigues are clear in every detail. In the second, the intrigues are in the main just as clear, but some of the details are too compacted and brisk to be understood; the viewer is aware only that heavy doings are in progress. The odd, amusing aspect of the difference between the two kinds is that it doesn't matter much. If the thriller is well made, the difference is fairly unimportant. The first kind is of course preferable, but the hurtle, the very shape and pace of the second kind, can carry it off. It is the genre itself, if competently handled, that holds us.

Such a "second kind" thriller is **The Tailor of Panama** (Columbia). In John le Carré's novel, the details are all there; in his screenplay, written with John Boorman and Andrew Davies, we know only what's going on in general. Some of the twists we take on trust, as fuel to keep the engine racing. This much is plain: a British intelligence agent in low official esteem is sent to Panama as if to Siberia, and there he finds an English tailor whom, by threats of blackmail, he enlists as an informer. The tailor, harried by the agent and hard up for money, must oblige; but he knows no real inside information, and so he invents tips for the agent. All of this spurious spying, the details of which are obscure, occurs within a large scheme that may entail the United States in a move to re-take the canal in post-Noriega Panama. Anyone who brings up the resemblance to Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* has been forestalled by le Carré himself. In the acknowledgments for the novel, he says that "without Graham Greene this book would never have come about."

Nor would it have come about without the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Le Carré is only one, though a masterly one, of the political-thriller authors to find themselves stuck for villains. Then, prompted by Greene, he struck gold in Panama, yet both the novel and the film emit the scent of research (which I don't remember from Greene). Le Carré's anti-Soviet novels pulsed with the authenticity of his government experience: they were the work of a man who didn't have to look things up. Throughout the Panama story, however, we seem to see the turning pages of a crammed notebook: a gay bar, a presidential quirk, a school for boys and another for girls, the lines of political gossip, and so forth. It is all in very skilled hands, but it seems diligently assembled, which the earlier le Carré stories did not.

The director, John Boorman—who also is English—has had a thematically checkered career. His first film, *Having a Wild Weekend* (1965), was a delightful spin-off of the Beatles era. Not only is there no later Boorman film with any relation to it, but hardly any of his fifteen or so films have any relation to one another. This could signal versatility and range of interests, or it could signal nothing more than the difficulty of getting work. His biggest hit—money is hardly an irrelevant point in film careers—was probably *Point Blank* (1967), a brutal American mobster picture. Possibly a thematic consistency is at last sliding into the Boorman career: his previous film, *Beyond Rangoon*, though not a traditional political thriller, had political colors; but the picture itself was bloated and unkempt. The Panama story has a guild tradition to keep it in genre shape, even when the plot gets muzzy. And, like most of its kind, the story affords plentiful chances for smart visual effects. (Example: one sequence takes place in a lake, with the camera at water level while two swimmers converse.)

The casting is helpful. Geoffrey Rush plays the tailor, and appears much more at ease in this present-day smarmer than he was as the grandiloquent Sade of *Quills*. Rush is as comic and pathetic as he needs to be, yet, quite unfairly to him, I kept imagining Michael Caine in the part, once again young enough to play it and finding more in it. Pierce Brosnan is the secret agent, which is something more than an inside joke. The world knows that he is the current James Bond, and though this agent has many of the Bond characteristics—suaveness, amorous proficiency, shrewdness—he is not as nice as 007. This character suggests a backstage view of Bond, what Bond is like when he is not on camera. Jamie Lee Curtis, sometimes intolerable, is here restrained, focused on truth, as the tailor's wife. The tailor has a dead uncle who mystically reappears from time to time, like Hamlet's dad, to advise him: Harold Pinter enjoys the part immensely.

A new play by David Mamet has just opened in London, a piece that (I've read) is written in an elegant Wildean style. Mamet's first play has just been filmed, and it is not in a Wildean style. **Lakeboat** (Panorama), written in 1970, takes place on a Great Lakes freighter sailing out of Chicago, and its language fits its crew. The young Mamet evidently had first-hand experience of such a ship and wanted to render a naturalistic account of the crew members' lives in the vein of the seagoing O'Neill, with the difference that the language is saltier, though the water is fresh.

It was a good idea to film this play; it was a bad idea to have Joe Mantegna direct it. Mantegna is an experienced Mamet actor, highly effective within a narrow range, but here he shows not the slightest directorial gift. The disaster begins before the film starts: Mamet puts a sophisticated French song, "La Mer," under the opening credits, tonally quite wrong and only tenuously related to the film's subject. Every scene, whether inside the ship or on deck, is blatantly a scene, played through with consciousness of its scene-shape, its beginning and end. The lighting of the interiors is contrived and arty, always out of kilter with the ship's steely body. The naturalism of the play, the insistent flow of its gritty reality, is sandbagged at every turn.

The actors don't help. David Mamet's brother Tony Mamet plays the central character, a young man on his first voyage, which is also a rite of passage; he is unimpressive. Most of the others have previously proved competent, but here they all seem to be speaking their lines as if they have been paid to do so, are fulfilling their obligations, and will then move on to the next job. Mantegna himself has a keen vernacular ear as an actor; but he hasn't used it as a director. Besides, he has cast Charles Durning and George Wendt as the captain and first mate, and—without prejudice against obese people—it is curious to behold these two, a total of about five hundred pounds of belly, running a ship.

Still, I can't help being glad that this film was made. It reminds us of the phenomenon that Mamet is, from this early O'Neill vein through the poignant fantasy of *The Water Engine*, in its three verbal

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modes, through *American Buffalo*, which penetrates vernacular so deeply that it converts it into a quasi-poetic language, to *Glengarry Glen Ross*, a play that is German expressionism seen through postmodern eyes, Georg Kaiser in Chicago. This brief account omits many of Mamet's plays, but I mention a few of his screenplays: his bitter-wry adaptation of *The Verdict*; his own evocative *House of Games*, which he also directed; his adaptation and direction of Terence Rattigan's ultra-English *The Winslow Boy*. So *Lakeboat* is an obliquely gratifying experience: it lets us see, even through this clumsy picture, how good Mamet was at the start and how, in very many ways, he has grown. ■

Jed Perl on Art
Theorists and Appreciators

I.

WHAT DOES IT mean when a gallerygoer says that an artist has made a leap in some new work? What does it mean when a painter says, "I want to complicate my imagery"? The meanings of these remarks, some would argue, could not be plainer. The leap to which the gallerygoer refers might be a leap from good to better or from better to great. The complication that the painter is talking about probably has something to do with incorporating more elements in a composition, with putting greater emphasis on the articulation of those elements. But of course there are others—artists and gallerygoers of a more philosophical turn of mind—who will insist that the meanings of these comments are anything but plain, that they are comprehensible only because we accept, almost unconsciously, a great variety of assumptions—about quality in art, about progress in art, about what makes a composition. And they will want to talk about these things.

All of this sounds quite reasonable, doesn't it? And so it ought to be. But in recent decades what one might have imagined as a conversation between those who look at a work of art and say, "It's beautiful" or "It's new," and those who say, "But what is beauty?" or "But what is newness?", has become very different. Basically, there is no conversation. There is hardly even a debate. Instead there is a rancorous face-off. There are theorists on one side and appreciators on the other side, and when they look at one another all they see is cartoons.

Each side has its turf. Each artist, each style seems to have become the property of one side or the other. A show such as the Wayne Thiebaud retrospective, which was at the Phillips Collection in Washington this winter and will be at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York this summer, is seen as belonging to the appreciators; they admire the density of Thiebaud's paint, the simplicity of his drawing, the cool eye with which he approaches nature. The retrospective of installations, videos, and photographs by Paul McCarthy, at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York this winter, belongs to the theorists; they look at McCarthy acting the clown from hell, messing around with mayonnaise and ketchup in the kitchen or farting in the studio, and explain, as Dan Cameron puts it in a catalogue essay, that McCarthy is "articulating the brutality and dehumanization that underlie the social equilibrium of this country."

The art world is divided, no question about it—split straight through. And this situation has left artists and gallerygoers divided against themselves, for it has become nearly impossible for anybody who cares about the arts to be what he or she really needs to be, which is both an appreciator and a theorist. You turn to art because you want something to look at, to linger over: you are an appreciator. But looking inevitably leads to more looking, to comparisons and contrasts, to the formulation of ideas, and when there are enough ideas you may have the begin-

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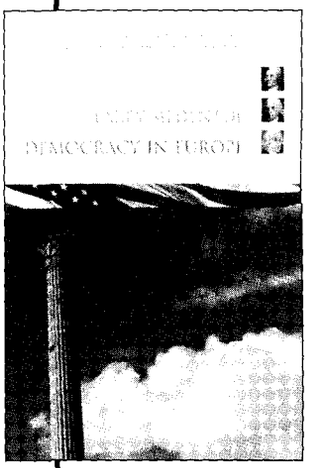

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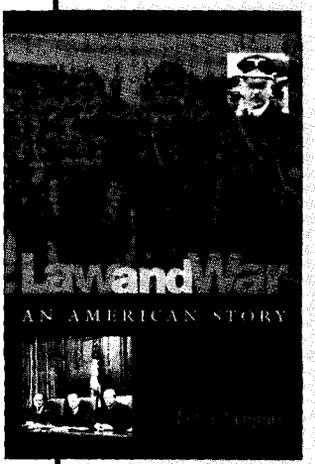

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ning of a theory. The fluid transactions between appreciation and theory have a catalytic power, and pull us into art's ever deepening mysteries. As one's ideas about art change, the quality and the character of one's experience of art change, too. Art can trump both appreciators and theorists; this is especially true of the greatest paintings and sculptures, which distill even the most elaborate theories into a particular shape. Yet what ought to be an almost instinctive union of theorist and appreciator seems to have become a kind of psychological impossibility.

The appreciators and the theorists do make timid moves into one another's territory. Many appreciators would describe themselves as formalists, which is a theory, and appreciators often have an idea that biographical information can enrich their experience of a work of art. Some theorists are adept at isolating an immediately evident element in a work, which they proceed to expatiate on at great length. But both theorists and appreciators, almost as a matter of policy, deny the strong appeal of the other side's position. And each camp is absorbed in its own internecine struggles; each camp contains its own enemy camps. Dan Cameron's broad-brush sociological approach to Paul McCarthy's videos would hardly seem like theory to art historians who take a semiotic or hermeneutic approach to Mondrian or Malevich. As for the appreciators, if they put their trust in what they regard as good naturalistic drawing or strong abstract color, they will want to have nothing to do with a very different kind of appreciator, who is gaga over the latest kind of kitsch, and regards theory as a kind of decorative flourish.

Everybody stands their ground, and it is no wonder that after so many years the ground on which people are standing has become narrower and narrower. The theorists have gone from examinations of the nature of beauty and its relation to social forces to assertions that beauty never existed, that it is only a construct, a delusion, an ideology. As for the appreciators, some of them have become fundamentalists, believers in what they regard as a few immutable truths about color and shape and craft; they are so intent on finding something beautiful to look at that they have become terrified of the very idea of change, of paradox, of complexity. By now it is difficult to remember that theory need not be ideological or polemical; that it can be nothing more than the mind working out the logic of its experience. Theory need not be definitive; it can be—it should be—speculative, partial, experimental. Where appreciation leaves off and theory begins is not always clear.

Hegel said that art expresses the mind's relation to the world; and to grasp such a connection you must be an appreciator *and* a theorist. If you like looking at landscape paintings, you will eventually be thinking about the evolution of landscape, about the types of possible structures. Yet that kind of fluid thinking—in which immediate experiences are compared and abstract ideas consequently emerge—has become increasingly difficult for artists and gallerygoers to sustain, even privately. The truth is that there are many people who do not want to see art's possibilities diminished, but still such a diminishment has taken place. A hard-line experience has by now been internalized on both sides, so that many artists and gallerygoers can barely recognize the possibility of a less rigid way of thinking. On both sides, imaginations are hunkered down.

Too often, appreciation seems to become a defensive posture. I am sympathetic to artists and gallerygoers who say, "What interests me is painting" or "What interests me is direct observation." But these statements are generally made in a downbeat spirit of diminishing possibilities. Appreciators do not only live in an ivory tower (which is where art often thrives); they have nailed shut the windows, locked the doors, and thrown away the keys. In the art schools, where air ought to be circulating, students seem adrift, offered doses from appreciators and doses from theorists but no way to see how these seemingly divergent ideas might be organically related. Theory has become so parochial that many of us have forgotten that theory can actually be a bulwark against parochialism. The long history of ideas about art—the centuries-old dialectic between a painterly style and a linear style, or between romantic attitudes and classical attitudes—ought to be able to free us to appreciate the uniqueness of individual works.

II.

Theory is in a kind of decadence, but then so is appreciation. And in recent years theory and appreciation have sometimes been joined in a kind of double decadence: in an ironic, know-it-all attitude. At "Open Ends," the third part of the Museum of Modern Art's year-long survey of twentieth-century art, which covered the years 1960 to 2000, theory and appreciation were spliced and diced into a chaotic smorgasbord of eleven mini-shows. Each show-within-the-show had an ambitious theme, but the ambitions carried no conviction. "White Spectrum" was about an extreme kind of monochromatic formalism—just the thing for hunkered-down appreciators. "Innocence and Experience," designed for theorists of a psychological bent, was about "a new, and frequently dark, imagery of childhood in contemporary art." "The Path of Resistance" was about political art.

"Open Ends" packaged sweeping themes in a kind of brand-name adorableness, and filled the entire museum. It epitomized both a hunger for broad ideas and a throw-in-the-towel sense that no broad idea can be related to any other one any longer. We were being asked to appreciate all this nifty variety, yet the upbeat news reports could not disguise what amounted to an intellectual train wreck.

Although the glib eclecticism that characterizes the Museum of Modern Art's current approach is disheartening, it is not exactly surprising at a time when artists and gallerygoers are divided against themselves. Yet the triviality of the museum's presentation—the clever titles, the gimmicky themes—is especially frustrating because it serves to disguise the dissatisfactions that are buried in the current scene. At "Open Ends," deeply felt conflicts were turned into an art mall full of something-for-everybody boutiques. To the extent that "Open Ends" lacked the strength of its convictions—of *any* convictions, those of the theorists or those of the appreciators—the exhibition suggested that we are at a point where all positions are beginning to melt down.

Certainly many people seem to believe that the theorists, who for decades were the dominant or at least the ascendant force in museums, galleries, art schools, and art history departments, are losing some of their influence. One hears reports from academia to the effect that even the theorists are fed up with theory, that there is a new interest in the object itself. In the art world for a number of years now there has been talk of a "return to beauty," which is presented as a sort of gosh-golly-gee, falling-in-love-with-love revelation, and no matter that the nature of beauty is one of the essential philosophical questions.

I do not care for the work of Sol LeWitt, but it seems to me that the considerable excitement surrounding the retrospective of his sculpture and wall drawings that toured the country last year was fueled by a sense that here was a case of theory in recovery, of beauty being back. There was a perception that LeWitt, who had been a theorist in his conceptually-oriented, white-on-white gridded cages, had become an appreciator in his strongly colored wall works of recent years (which still preserve a conceptualist respectability in that they are executed by assistants to the specifications of the artist). I do not detect any internal drama in either early LeWitt or

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recent LeWitt, but this lack of drama hardly seemed to have mattered to the members of the press and the public who saw an artist crossing a divide and announcing, "I used to think. Now I look."

LeWitt didn't think very well thirty years ago, and he doesn't give us much to look at now. His remains an imagination divided against itself. Recovering theorists—and LeWitt may be counted in that company—are in revolt against the aridity of their former selves; they sometimes speak as if they had emerged from a kind of false consciousness. Yet ex-theorists who become evangelical appreciators have a way of reminding us that appreciation can have an aridity about it, too.

III.

WHEN MATTERS HAVE reached an impasse, as they surely have today, the people with the liveliest minds often start backtracking, so that they can then begin to work out a new way to move forward. Such artists, critics, and historians want to know how we got into this mess in the first place, and whether there is any way out. An eagerness to break through our current face-off, I think, is fueling the contemporary surge of interest in earlier twentieth-century writings on art history and aesthetics, particularly in German-language works in which the relationships between formal structures and broader meanings are discussed with a genuine freedom, an experimental avidity, a recognition of the competing claims of theory and appreciation.

The evidence of this intellectual revival is plentiful. *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, which was published by the Getty Research Institute in 1994, is an anthology that groups pioneering studies on questions of formal expression, including *The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts*, written by the artist Adolf von Hildebrand in 1893, a book that was prized by many twentieth-century artists, including Hans Hofmann, who made it required reading for students when he taught in Munich in the 1920s. In 1999, the Getty also produced translations of Alois Riegl's *The Group Portraiture of Holland* and Aby Warburg's *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*. Several works by Otto Pächt (1902–1988), one of a number of historians who in the 1930s were responding to Riegl, including *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*, have been published by Harvey Miller in England. And now Christopher S. Wood, who teaches art history at Yale and provided an introduction for the translation of Pächt's *The Practice of Art History*, has produced *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s* (Zone Books), which shows how Riegl's ideas influenced the thinking of Pächt, Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984), and Fritz Novotny (1902–1983), and in turn provoked responses from Walter Benjamin and Meyer Schapiro.

EVEN A CASUAL exposure to some of this material serves to reanimate the old debates about the relationship between form and content or between appreciation and theory, debates that have become unbearably arid in recent years. That ideas such as Riegl's *Kunstwollen* or Sedlmayr's *Strukturanalyse* will be somewhat baffling to non-professionals—they often leave scholars bemused too, or arriving at wildly contradictory conclusions—is not a bad thing. I am offering only the crudest rendition of Riegl's *Kunstwollen* when I say that it denotes a cultural will-to-form that is expressed in works of art both major and minor. And Sedlmayr's idea of *Strukturanalyse* surely amounts to much more than the thought that a practiced eye can distinguish in the immediate structure of a work of art a kind of cultural gestalt. But even in these short-hand forms, Riegl's and Sedlmayr's ideas have the effect of messing up what have become all-too-neat distinctions between the appreciator's interest in the evidence of our eyes and the theorist's interest in deeper, broader implications.

At a time when artists, gallerygoers, and critics often seem cornered—trapped in a particular view of formalism, historicism, hermeneutics, modernism, postmodernism, anti-modernism—it can feel liberating to reconsider a period when formalism and contextualism as we know them today were in their vibrant youth, a part of some larger whole, although the nature of that whole was the subject of wild, often hopelessly speculative disputes. Christopher S. Wood's long, brilliant introduction to his *Vienna School Reader* offers a very lively discussion of the complex dynamic between perceptible structures and deeper meanings that one finds in the work of these early-twentieth-century art historians. Riegl's *Kunstwollen*—his grand argument that each period has its own unique will-to-form that is reflected in all works of art, whether decorative works or paintings or sculptures—is the generative idea here. And Wood shows how the response to Riegl, which centered around the journal *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, of which only two issues appeared in the early 1930s, was cut off by the coming of Hitler and the war. Sedlmayr, who remained in Germany, was a Nazi sympathizer and a party member in 1932–1933. Pächt spent the war years in England, where he devoted most of his energies to the close study of illuminated manuscripts. Historians such as Panofsky and Gombrich, who owed something to the idea of *Kunstwollen*, distanced themselves from what Gombrich especially felt was the idea's Nazi coloration, in that it could be seen as relating artistic qualities to racial characteristics.

FOR WOOD, WHO is the author of an impressive book called *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* and who approaches this material from the vantage point of the historian, these writings raise large methodological problems, and he is understandably concerned to grapple with the almost mystical elements in Riegl's and Sedlmayr's ideas. Wood has as sharp a mind as I know when it comes to giving epigrammatic descriptions of ideas, and he can present the broader context for these ideas in a brief, elegant flash of words. He approaches some of the Vienna School's woollier speculations with a healthy skepticism; but what is most exciting is his sense of pleasure in the grand schemes of these thinkers, in their imaginative leaps and their hunger to grasp the meaning in a form.

Wood is not snowed by their ideas, he is gripped by them. He is very interesting on Sedlmayr's *Strukturanalyse*, sensing both its appeal and the danger inherent in its assault on empirical experience, in its almost romantic hope that the formal logic of a work of art can encode a cultural moment. Wood observes that *Strukturanalyse* "rests on the intuitive, nondiscursive, holistic apprehension of meaning. At the moment of interpretation—like the *anagnorisis* that the plot of classical drama turns on—the art historian simply recognizes the world concretized in the work." Wood is at pains to point out that Sedlmayr's approach was not scientific in the ways he might have hoped it would be. Yet Wood is exercised by the possibility that the wish to grasp what is immediate and what is conceptually elusive may necessitate certain imaginative leaps. He admits that "a lot of the most creative art history and cultural history of the last hundred years will fall short of the strictest standards of empiricist responsibility." As Wood says, there is an "intuitionism" about Riegl's will-to-form. This worries the scrupulous historian; and yet he speculates that we may not be able to do entirely without intuitionism. "It may turn out," he writes, "that any cultural analysis grounded in formal analysis will have to rely at some point, with more or less explicitness, on intuitive links between form and world."

If Wood's approach to these historians of the 1930s suggests a new attitude in art-

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historical circles, it is because he seems so attuned to the appreciator's avidity that draws us to images, and in turn makes us want to know what those images mean. He sees paradoxes and risks everywhere, and this is good. I think that the interest in Riegl and Sedlmayr, and in the very different ideas of early Panofsky and of Warburg, is fueled by a sense that they are all, in their different ways, both appreciators and theorists. Wood knows that it is difficult to balance these approaches. "The work flattened out in the art historian's text," he writes, "suffers the breakdown of its representational devices and the foiling of its references and symbolic notations." Later he observes that "any historical method that tries to keep faith with the density and singularity of the image will have to resort to allegory when it gets around to doing history." Wood tosses off these observations with considerable panache. Sometimes I don't know quite where he is in all of his ruminations, but the openness of his thinking is inspiriting.

IV.

THE NUMBING FACE-OFFS between theorists and appreciators that have characterized the art world in the past twenty years can seem like a ghastly irrelevance when you begin to consider the broadness of some of the ideas that were circulating in art-historical circles seventy-five years ago. And art historians who look back with a kind of amazement ought to be able to understand how contemporary artists feel when they contemplate the analytical powers of artists such as Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Klee, whose speculative leaps run parallel to some of this art-historical work and share an early-twentieth-century taste for theoretical grandeur.

The truth is that even many artists who have a healthy skepticism about theory have always had a hunger for ideas. Panofsky's theoretical writings on proportion and perspective have been admired by painters for decades, as have Schapiro's delicate meditations on the relationship between iconographical meaning and formal meaning in medieval art. Yet there has been a tendency to regard the writings of Panofsky and Schapiro as isolated incidents, secret rapprochements between speculation and specificity that, in a world split between appreciators and theorists, are permanently out of context. Neither Panofsky nor Schapiro, moreover, would have wanted us to extrapolate too much from their work; the careful empiricism of their essays was itself meant as a criticism of grand abstractions such as Riegl's *Kunstwollen*.

The banalization of theory has made theorists an all-too-easy target. But the resistance to theory, at least among many artists in New York, has a deeper origin: it is grounded in an animus that predates by many decades both political correctness and the mangled language of *October* magazine. Indeed, a disjunction between appreciators and theorists can be said to be at the very core of American art's struggle for independence in the years during and after World War II. Beginning in the 1940s, American art achieved its directness, its immediacy, its boldness partly owing to a fortifying skepticism about all the vast theoretical propositions that had been born in nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Europe. In New York there was a revolt against ideas of Progress, of Will, of Romanticism, of Purity, a revolt that is key to the vitality of American art from mid-century onward.

This revolt is often associated with the anti-Marxism of the late 1940s, but in artistic circles it could be mixed with a skepticism about any over-arching idea. I believe that ideas such as *Kunstwollen* and its various transformations and corruptions had more impact in New York in the 1930s and 1940s than is now acknowledged: it was through the process of burying those ideas that Americans began to become themselves. You feel these bold doubts about big ideas in de Kooning's statements around 1950 in which he declares himself fed up with all the "isms" of European art. You find them a decade later in Donald Judd's argument that all art history is local history, and thus immune to the grand sweep of theory; "a lot of things just can't be connected," Judd wrote in 1964. You also find them in Fairfield Porter's essays, in which he insists on the importance of specifics and particularities, and rejects all forms of generalization or idealism.

The New York School said no to theory; and saying no to theory was for several decades a way of affirming the self, of developing a personal counter-theory. The directness and the concreteness of much of American art was fueled by a sense of the danger inherent in all great theoretical propositions. Ellsworth Kelly is a case in point. His big, simple shapes are so quirky that they seem to quietly mock the old purist idea of a singular, essential artistic form. Kelly's pragmatic purism is interesting not least because it is a dissent from earlier, more theoretically oriented forms of constructivist purism. What is exceptional about the clarity of his abstractions is their often quirky derivations, the way he will find a hard-edged shape in something as inherently impressionistic as the shadows on a staircase. Kelly's work builds on ideas in European art—especially in Arp, who was both a Dadaist and a classicist, as well as in the paper cutouts of Matisse; but much of the unique impact of Kelly's work is fueled by the oppositional relationship that he seems to have developed to the idealism of Mondrian or Malevich. The impurity of Kelly's purism could not exist without an idea of purity. Today it would be difficult for a younger artist to say no to purity, since purity as an idea has so little weight.

V.

THE ELEMENT THAT is missing in the arts today is a dialectical sense. Hardly anybody takes it for granted any longer that art's hard-won equilibrium is a response to dialectical forces, to pressures and counter-pressures. Could it be that people are so burnt out by art-world conflicts that they have lost the sense of conflict as a creative process? If artists and gallerygoers find it difficult to be both theorists and appreciators, it may be because they have become constitutionally incapable of considering two propositions at one time. Only when the dialectical sense has vanished can an interest in surface and an interest in meaning be so alienated from each other.

While the idea of dialectical tension is no longer generally discussed, it remains an idea to which all the most interesting artists somehow manage to find their way. Artists take it for granted that they must push up against something, which is initially the actuality of their materials; and when they keep pushing they realize that something more is needed. Consciously or otherwise, each artist must be a theorist of his or her own work. Nowadays this improvisatory theory most often consists of some sort of private myth about where the work comes from, the invention of a personal relationship to the past. The artist might be inclined to describe this as a sense of tradition. The work suggests a certain range of concerns, of possibilities: a theory of what a painting might be, against which the particularity of the work can be judged.

The success of Bill Jensen's new paintings, fourteen of which were shown at the Mary Boone Gallery in February, has to do with the extent to which Jensen manages to locate their relatively simple and pared-down imagery in a broader context. In this show Jensen seemed to be thinking up a visual world (theorizing about it) and then living in it (appreciating it). Working with paint that has been thinned to the consistency of Japanese ink, Jensen unfurls jagged, looping calligraphic strokes over surfaces that have the luxuriant patinas of faded gold leaf and weather-worn bronze and centuries-old vellum. There is something sleek and

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easy on the eyes about these paintings, but that is just their Gilded Age come-on. In most of the compositions, broad strokes of paint create a sort of floating foreground suspended before an equally ambiguous background, but the weight of the color and the differences in surface treatments give these juxtapositions a specificity, a focus.

Jensen's paintings have a fascinating double life, grabbing a gallerygoer on first glance while also working slowly, almost covertly. He lets us know what kinds of things he is thinking about. An interest in classical Japanese ink painting is evident. So is his fascination with a premodern idea of the artist as a craftsman. And one can see many allusions to de Kooning and to Abstract Expressionism in general. This is by no means an especially unfamiliar range of influences, and the reason for Jensen's success is that they operate both immediately (for the appreciator) and suggestively (for the theorist).

Jensen's effects are very exact, but also broad in their impact. In *Ashes to Ashes* some drips of red paint at the bottom of the canvas have a clarity of shape that I don't think I have ever seen in dripped paint before. Dripped painting generally evokes Abstract Expressionism and the automatist experiments of the Surrealists, but in *Ashes to Ashes* one's thoughts about such precedents are grounded in the specifics of those spots of color. While there might be a suggestion that this is the red of blood, the suggestion is not sentimental, because the weight of each of the drops is so warily observed. Jensen's painterly moves have metaphorical payoffs.

I LEFT JENSEN'S show feeling that he has his own thoughts about Abstract Expressionism and about Japan, which is as it should be. Like most contemporary artists who manage to draw us into their work, Jensen both constructs and inhabits his own theoretical universe. But there is a paradox here: to the extent that an artist makes us feel at home in such a universe, we may also find ourselves frustrated by the very limits of that universe. Theories suggest expanding perspectives. We begin to hope that the particularity of one artist's work can somehow be related to the work of other artists; but this does not happen very often now.

For as long as the best contemporary artists are all living in their own homemade theoretical universes, the art world as a whole is going to feel confused, adrift. It is disturbing that nobody seems able to come up with a theory that can account for anything but his or her own work, that there is nothing to do but go from oasis to oasis. How do Jensen's themes connect with anybody else's themes? And what is theory if there is no commonality of ideas? The effort to explain what we have seen with our eyes is always a move into the realm of ideas; and if those who have seen the most with their eyes are most afraid of ideas, then it is no wonder that a kind of aridity can surround even the really exciting achievements.

In his essay on the Vienna School, Christopher S. Wood observes that "in *Strukturanalyse*, the dynamism of the interpretative procedure and the fictional integrity of the work are on a collision course." Perhaps all interpretation brings with it such a danger. In the past several decades, certainly, theorists and appreciators have been on a collision course. Appreciators are so concerned with the fictional integrity of the work of art that they sometimes just assume that it means nothing, rather than risk taking the work apart in order to find out. And theorists have forgotten that there is anything to put together again. The result has been an art-world disconnection of monumental proportions—a sense that nothing fits with anything else. Gallerygoers have experiences, but they cannot locate those experiences in a larger context.

Appreciators are eager to tell us that theory can have a numbing effect, and this is frequently true. But when theory has vanished—when good and bad or old and new have no theoretical basis—there is no way of evaluating our experiences. Only when artists and gallerygoers take a gamble, and once again are moving easily between immediate experience and theoretical speculation, can art really begin to feel complete. ■

Arbeit Macht Fraud

By ROBERT ALTER

The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth by Stefan Maechler translated by John E. Woods

(Schocken, 496 pp., $16.95)

THE CASE OF the Swiss-German writer who calls himself Binjamin Wilkomirski is a painfully instructive fable of our genocide-haunted times. The storm of debate that was triggered in 1995 by the publication of *Fragments*, his purported testimony of an early childhood of unspeakable torment in the Majdanek and Birkenau camps, has now largely subsided, so it may be useful to refresh our memories by reviewing the basic facts of the affair.

Wilkomirski's little book was widely received with extravagant and often reverential enthusiasm—in Europe, and much more so in America, especially among Jews. (The English translation appeared in 1996.) Critics and cultural luminaries praised the book as a masterpiece. The eminent children's book illustrator Maurice Sendak enigmatically announced that in Wilkomirski's story "all children ... are finally vindicated." Awards were showered on the author, chiefly by Jewish organizations, together with a spate of invitations to make public appearances. The peculiar persona that he chose to assume for these public occasions is something to which I shall return, for it provides an important clue to the explanation of the Wilkomirski phenomenon, and of the troubling complicity between him and his audiences.

From the beginning, there were questions about whether *Fragments* was an authentic testimony or a fabrication. (A consideration of the sources from which it was shaped precludes the use of a more honorific term for fiction, such as "work of imagination.") In early 1995, while the book was in production, its publisher, the esteemed German house Suhrkamp, received a letter from a Swiss journalist raising doubts about the status of *Fragments* as a factual narrative. Thomas Sparr, the head of the Jüdischer Verlag, the Suhrkamp imprint under which the book was to appear, hesitated for a time, but in the end he and his colleagues

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decided to brush aside these objections and to proceed with publication.

Doubts temporarily faded into the background amid the general acclaim that greeted *Fragments*, though some readers, such as the distinguished historian Raul Hilberg, wondered about a variety of historical improbabilities in the story. (It should also be noted that the book's success in attracting public attention did not make it a best-seller: the total English-language sales were less than 33,000 copies, and the original German version sold only 13,000.) Then on August 27, 1998, an Israeli-born Swiss writer named Daniel Ganzfried, himself the child of a concentration-camp survivor, published an article in the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* flatly declaring that the whole book was "an internalized collection of images by a man whose imagination has run away with him," and that Wilkomirski, far from having spent his early years in the death camps, had lived his whole life in Switzerland under a different name.

Other exposés followed, including a piece on *60 Minutes*. Wilkomirski's credibility was gravely compromised, but some staunch defenders of the authenticity of the book continued to rally round him. In order to settle the facts of the matter, the German literary agency that had handled *Fragments* retained Stefan Maechler, a Swiss historian, to conduct a full investigation of the affair. The book that Maechler has produced (which includes the integral text of the purported memoir) is a model of scrupulous, dispassionate research. Its judgment of the moral and psychological issues raised by this strange case is admirably balanced. A step-by-step sorting out of the truth from a roiling murk of claims and counter-claims, Maechler's work reads as compellingly as a detective story.

HERE, IN SUMMARY, is the story, as Maechler has established it. Binjamin Wilkomirski is actually Bruno Grosjean, the illegitimate child of Yvonne Grosjean, a Swiss factory-worker who bore him in the town of Biel in 1941. He was not born in Riga, as he claims, and he has no Jewish ancestry, and he came into the world some three years later than the narrator of *Fragments* who was taken off to the camps. Yvonne Grosjean was unable to support her child (the father, a man seven years her junior whom she appears to have seduced, remained out of the picture), and the boy was placed in a foster home on a farm, with a foster mother who proved to be emotionally troubled, and later in the urban home of a childless physician and his wife, who seem to have treated him with kindness. The adult Bruno Grosjean became an instrument-maker and a clarinetist. He was married and divorced, and for many years he has been living with the same woman companion.

By the early 1970s, Grosjean had already become preoccupied with the German mass murder of the Jews. He traveled a number of times as a tourist to the concentration camps, and when he was in Poland in 1972 he attended a concert given by the well-known violinist Wanda Wilkomirska. When someone that evening remarked that he bore a striking resemblance to her and could easily be taken for her brother, he picked up the cue—a promiscuous porousness to hints and suggestions would emerge as a defining feature of his character—and made it the basis for what would evolve as a new identity. He hung a poster of Wilkomirska in his flat in Zurich, and he began to explain to people that he had met his sister in Poland, and that another sister was living among Gypsies, while the rest of the family had perished in the camps, except for the father, who was killed by Polish partisans. Bruno Grosjean was metamorphosing into Binjamin Wilkomirski. After two decades of psychological labor on the materials of this invented self, he summed up the story of himself as concentration-camp victim in *Fragments*.

Whether one looks at the purported autobiography recorded in *Fragments* or at the supplementary information about himself that the author has provided in interviews, there is scarcely any significant element of the Wilkomirski story that stands up under scrutiny. The list of glaring contradictions of fact that has been patiently assembled by Maechler is too long to repeat here, but I will give a few exemplary instances. The Kraków orphanage in which Wilkomirski says he stayed after the war was not opened until 1946, by which time he was, according to his own account, in Switzerland. His entry into Switzerland in a Red Cross transport with a blank name tag around his neck would have been impossible under the immigration procedures then in force, nor is it conceivable that Swiss authorities at that time would have imposed a Christian identity on a Jewish child. He claims to have no relationship with Yvonne Grosjean, but in 1981 he contested her will, arguing that she was "my birth mother." Many of the details of concentration-camp life that are narrated in his book contradict what is known from the historical record, including the horrific plague of rats at Majdanek, plausible as it sounds. (There was no infestation of rats at Majdanek.) In an interview, Wilkomirski claimed that he was subjected to medical experiments at Birkenau that left him with a series of life-long ailments, including an odd bump on the back of his head; but the Nazi doctors who are alleged to have experimented on him, Hans Wilhelm König and Horst Fischer, left Birkenau well before he says he arrived there, and it turns out that Wilkomirski's son has a very similar bump on the back of his head.

WILKOMIRKSI CONCOCTED this whole story, which so many readers found to be riveting testimony, from bits and pieces of books that he read, films that he saw, and things that were told to him by actual survivors. There are some borrowings, as Maechler shows, from Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, itself a purportedly autobiographical novel about the unspeakable horrors of a wartime childhood by someone who actually spent those years with his parents in relative safety and comfort. Even *Heidi*, that old Swiss chestnut, provided some source material.

At least one scene in *Fragments*, the Alpine ski lift equipped with a Sauer engine that the child takes to be a Nazi gassing van, appears to be a transposition of a scene from Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. (Readers should surely have registered the improbability that, after four or five years of living in Switzerland, the boy would never have seen a ski lift or have known what it was. The real Grosjean was in fact an experienced skier from childhood.) The details of the rural setting near Zamość, Poland in which the child Binjamin takes shelter at the beginning of the book are largely drawn from the farm surroundings of his first foster home. At least one camp survivor with whom Wilkomirski had extensive conversations protested that he had stolen her biography, and in general there is something eerily parasitic about the way he took in anecdotes and images from all sides and absorbed them into the tissue of his new victim-self.

The transformation of Bruno Grosjean into Binjamin Wilkomirski does not appear to have been a cold plan—though one wonders whether some undercurrent of self-interested calculation may not have been present all along. It was, rather, a matter of self-delusion. And, sad to say, the delusion was encouraged and reinforced by long years of psychotherapy that provoked Grosjean's "memories" in a manner analogous to the recovered-memory movement in America, even leading him to develop and to expound publicly his own theories about the importance of coming to terms with traumatic memories. In any case, the identity that he "recovered" gave him a new sense of meaningful destiny, and of acceptance by the world around him. Maechler aptly

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summarizes this process: "Videotapes and eyewitness reports of Wilkomirski's presentations give the impression of a man made euphoric by his own narrative. He truly blossomed in his role as concentration-camp victim, for it was in it that he finally found himself."

THE REAL QUESTION about any widely accepted hoax—say, James Macpherson's *Ossian*, the pseudo-medieval epic widely believed by readers of the 1760s to be an authentic creation of the Middle Ages—concerns its audience. The deception must fulfill some need in its audience if it is to foster credulity even in the face of troubling or giveaway details. I must confess that I did not read *Fragments* until doubts about its authenticity had already been voiced. With this awareness, I was struck by a whole series of improbabilities in the text, and I saw none of the supposed brilliance in the rendering of a child's perception of the horrors. Despite the title, the book seemed to me to present a fairly conventional narrative of events, not really a fragmentary one at all, and there was a good deal of contrivance. (This was perhaps most palpable in the highly protracted series of Swiss episodes, from the ski lift to William Tell imagined as a Nazi rifleman, in which the child continues to see the lineaments of his concentration-camp experiences in peaceful Switzerland.)

Would I have read the book differently had I been convinced that it was a genuine piece of testimony? It distresses me to say that the answer is almost certainly yes. We all defer, I suspect, to the authority of testimony by those who have experienced the greatest historical atrocity in recent memory; and a certain deference to human suffering that most of us have been lucky enough to escape is morally understandable. But it does not follow that every testimony has to be accepted as authoritative, or as some sort of "vindication" (in Sendak's terms), or even as true. Memory distorts what it means to recall; the representation of experience through language inevitably has its own bias; and every author of a testimony is necessarily an interested party in the telling of the story.

For these reasons, I would contend that even in the discomfiting instance of the literature of the Shoah, testimonial or fictional, we need to trust the tale, not the teller. There cannot be a single morally correct way to write about this terrible subject. The Israeli novelist David Grossman, who is neither a survivor nor a child of survivors, has thrown a probing light on the perversion of all moral categories in the camps through the unlikely projector of magical realism in his remarkable novel, *See Under: 'Love'*. At the other end of the spectrum, the Hungarian writer Imre Kertész, who lived through Auschwitz as an adolescent, has produced an extraordinary autobiographical novel called *Fateless*, which conveys a chillingly convincing sense of how a young person by rapid stages comes to adapt himself to the terms of a radically altered reality in which people are no more than dirt and it is assumed as a matter of course that almost everyone is going to die very soon. *Fateless* is an instructive contrast to *Fragments*: free of rhetorical insistence and of sensationalistic accounts of violence, and firmly resisting the temptation to translate the camp experience into any symbolic register beyond the bleak facts, the tale itself persuades us, whatever we may know or not know about the teller. It seems perfectly right that Kertész should have denounced Wilkomirski as an "Auschwitz swindler" and a "Holocaust guru."

WHY, THEN, WERE so many people so ready to embrace Wilkomirski's patently cobbled-together tale? The answer to this question broaches a fundamental trait of our culture. There is a hunger for testimony in our culture, I think; and the need that the testimony satisfies is less for a proper understanding of the Nazi program of genocide than for a frisson of identification with the victims, a sense of vicarious excitement in imagining oneself with those who were thrust by fate into the heart of ultimate evil. (Only the language of melodrama will serve to represent this mentality.) I suspect that the fascination with Shoah testimony has more to do with the current vogue of the Marquis de Sade in biography and in film than with the efforts to sort out causes and events of scrupulous historians such as Saul Friedländer and Christopher Browning.

It should also be noted that the cult of testimony has an especially powerful appeal for Jews, perhaps because it seems to offer a means of overcoming the superficiality and the blandness of their actual Jewish identities through the power of identification with the Jew as supreme victim. In this regard, Grosjean/Wilkomirski is a contemporary everyman, or every-Jew, writ large. He discovers meaning, direction, and vocation by re-fashioning himself as a Jewish victim. With a sure instinct, he makes himself over as a Jew in the mode of kitsch that is the most accessible and the most marketable means of proffering identity to wide audiences. On reading tours in Europe, Wilkomirski liked to come on stage wearing a shawl strongly reminiscent of a tallis. He would then perform Max Bruch's version of the Kol Nidre on the clarinet, after which an actor would read the sacred text of *Fragments*, usually reducing its author to tears. At the conclusion of his Frankfurt appearance, a band played a klezmer piece called "Shalom Binjamin" that was composed in his honor.

This winning combination of concentration-camp testimony and histrionic Yiddishkeit succeeded in bringing out of the woodwork droves of admiring souls, some innocently fooled, some charlatans themselves. Wilkomirski was deluged with adulatory letters, most of them from women. In Israel he encountered an ultra-Orthodox Jew, an actual survivor of the camps, who managed to persuade himself that Wilkomirski was his lost son, long thought to have perished. Wilkomirski, never one to resist a suggestion, was ready enough to go along with the idea. The most bizarrely instructive of his conquests was a woman who called herself Laura Grabowski, whom he met on a trip to Los Angeles. Hugging Wilkomirski, Grabowski announced that they had been childhood friends in the camps and afterward in the Kraków orphanage. "He is my Binje, that's all I know," she proclaimed before a television camera. "He has my heart and soul and I have his heart and soul." Wilkomirski eagerly confirmed all this, of course.

In fact, Laura Grabowski was an American named Laurel Willson, alias Lauren Stratford. Under the latter name, she had written a bogus autobiography called *Satan's Underground*, in which she claimed to have been repeatedly raped and sodomized as a little girl by members of a satanic cult to which her mother had delivered her. Now she sought money from a Swiss fund for Holocaust survivors as a campmate of Binjamin Wilkomirski. As Maechler tartly puts it, "The victim of satanism had ... mutated into a victim of Nazism. The woman had exchanged her cross for the Star of David." One could scarcely find a more vivid demonstration that the Wilkomirski phenomenon is an important chapter in the contemporary cult of victimhood, in which rampant delusions, confidence games, and the sheer titillation of identifying with hideous suffering make common cause.

At least two prevalent pathologies of everyday contemporary life are manifested in the Wilkomirski affair, associated with the cult of victimhood but extending beyond it. There is the notion, which one can trace all the way back to some of the founding texts of literary modernism and which has a latter-day advocate in George Steiner, that authenticity can be realized only in the inferno of extreme crisis. (Michael André Bernstein has argued persuasively against this idea in *Foregone Conclusions*.) And there is also the con-

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temporary disposition, more than half a century after the banking down of the crematoria, to conceive of the Jews not as real people living in history with their own internal divisions, manifest imperfections, and concrete political aspirations, but rather as emblematic figures in an allegorical masque of timeless human suffering—a Christological reconfiguration of the Jews, perhaps, in which they themselves have become deeply complicit.

Thus Wilkomirski, the Gentile tricked out as the Jew in skullcap and virtual prayer shawl, performing Kol Nidre melodies and recounting the fabricated story of his survival in the maw of genocide, transformed himself into an ideal screen for the projection of such identification, a baby Jesus now resurrected from the cross of suffering, a Wandering Jew persisting with dignity and courage in his long destiny of persecution, a Hansel (with Laurel Willson as his Gretel) escaped from the witch's house in the woods. The last of these comparisons is suggested to me by Maechler, who sees something reminiscent of a fairy tale in this story of "a small child who strays into the clutches of evil, but survives."

The sort of interest in the concentration-camp world that made possible the initial acclaim that was accorded to *Fragments* is the exact opposite of a concern with history. To be interested in history is to engage with the extreme and often intractable heterogeneity of historical events, motives, and causes, and also of the experience of those who are caught up in particular historical processes. The attempt to fathom this heterogeneity, which has a strong but always indeterminate relevance to our own lives, has been a central activity of the Western tradition at least since Herodotus and the author of the David story. But to impose the neatness of a fairy tale or a Passion narrative on historical events, and to use a stereotypical image of those events as a vehicle for experiencing longed-for intensities, is to swerve away from the difficulties of historical understanding, to convert history into the stuff of bad dreams. Some such process was surely at play in the collusion between Bruno Grosjean and his predominantly Jewish audiences in the making of Binjamin Wilkomirski. And unless the cultural weather vanes are mistaken, we may brace ourselves for more of the same in the near future, in new and unforeseen forms. ■

Past and Presents

By PETER N. MILLER

The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France by Natalie Zemon Davis

(University of Wisconsin Press, 185 pp., $21.95)

I.

WALTER BENJAMIN, who perished in September 1940 at Port-Bou in the shipwreck of Europe's Jews, once wrote that "when a valued, cultured and elegant friend sent me his new book and I was about to open it, I caught myself in the act of straightening my tie." The reviewer of a new book by Natalie Zemon Davis ought to feel the same. She has been one of the most innovative historians working in North America in the past four decades. Without any self-promoting fanfare, Davis's works have set many of the fashions now followed by other historians.

Since her dissertation on the printers of Lyon, Davis has been interested in class, books, religion, archives, and above all the individual people of sixteenth-century France. *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983) explored the silences in a strange story about a husband who disappeared for several years and then just as suddenly returned to his small town and resumed his life—before being caught out years later when the real husband appeared. *Fiction in the Archives* (1987) was an archival scholar's demonstration that archives cannot be treated as innocent repositories of pure facts, but contain already formed narratives lying in wait for unsuspecting readers. *Women on the Margins* (1995) drew together some of the important themes of Davis's recent work—the history of writing, of women, and of Jews—in a study of three seventeenth-century Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant women through their autobiographies.

First presented in the early 1980s and perfected in the late 1990s, Davis's new book spans this period of great intellectual and scholarly success. Its long gestation has meant that Davis has been pipped to the post by many other books on "the gift" and gifts; but this gives her work a depth lacking in many of those studies. For her loyal readers it has the effect of making this book a kind of super-commentary on the books that she wrote at the same time but happened to publish first.

IN DAVIS'S HANDS, "the gift" is a key that opens a closed door to sixteenth-century France. She begins with a discussion of two "age-old core beliefs" about the need to give freely, as if in imitation of God (the vertical model), and the need to give widely, as social life could not exist without reciprocity (the horizontal model). On these axes, she says, the history of civilization itself can be plotted. Davis does not try to account for the origin of these beliefs, but she does describe four "languages" of gift-giving that were alive and thriving in the sixteenth century: Christian charity, noble liberality, the favors of friendship, and neighborly generosity. Behind all this largesse, of course, lurked the Bible and classical literature. Exactly how words affected deeds, especially in the context of the unlettered or the under-lettered, is not addressed.

In this conceptual setting Davis turns to describe the life of gifts in chapters forthrightly titled "Gift Practices and Public Times," "Gift Practices and Social Meanings," "Gifts and Sales," "Gifts Gone Wrong," "Gifts, Bribes, and Kings," and "Gifts and the Gods." These are rich and dense in illustration. Beyond giving us the past as it was concretely lived, the specific examples contribute to Davis's ongoing project of making more complex our historical understanding of early modern France, and more precise the repertory of analytical tools at our disposal for interpreting it.

All this is true to her declaration that "this book is not so much about The Gift as it is an ethnography of gifts in sixteenth-century France and a cultural and social study of what I call a 'gift register' or a 'gift mode.'" Ethnography is the central term in this description; but one does not even have to open the book to discern the overarching importance of what we might be tempted to call the anthropological register. The book's title is enough. For it refers explicitly to *L'essai sur le don*, or *The Gift*,

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by Marcel Mauss. Echoes of anthropology are everywhere in Davis's earlier work; but in this new book the identification, even the homage, is made explicit, and central to the historical endeavor. Before we can properly engage with Davis's book, we need to answer two questions: Who was Marcel Mauss? Why should historians be interested in his work?

II.

MARCEL ISRAËL MAUSS was born in Epinal, France in 1872, the grandson of Rabbi Moïse Durkheim of Epinal, and the nephew, and later the student, of Émile Durkheim, the founder of French sociology. He became a socialist and abandoned his religious practice, though he returned to Epinal for holiday meals long into adulthood. In the 1930s Mauss sat on the Central Committee of the Alliance Israelite Universale, and he wore his yellow star during the German occupation of Paris. For some unknown reason he was not deported, and he died at home in 1950.

Mauss's professional career was built in the service of his uncle. He helped to found the Institut d'Ethnologie in Paris. He was awarded a professorship at the Collège de France, at the advanced age of 59; and he held the chair in "The History of Religions of Non-Civilized Peoples" at the École des Hautes Études. Mauss is now a name to conjure with. There are references and citations in works strewn across the whole range of the social sciences. There is even a learned journal titled *La Revue du MAUSS* (which refers to *Mouvement anti-utilitariste en sciences sociales*). And all this eminence is owed mostly to a slender monograph originally published in the Durkheimians' journal in 1924.

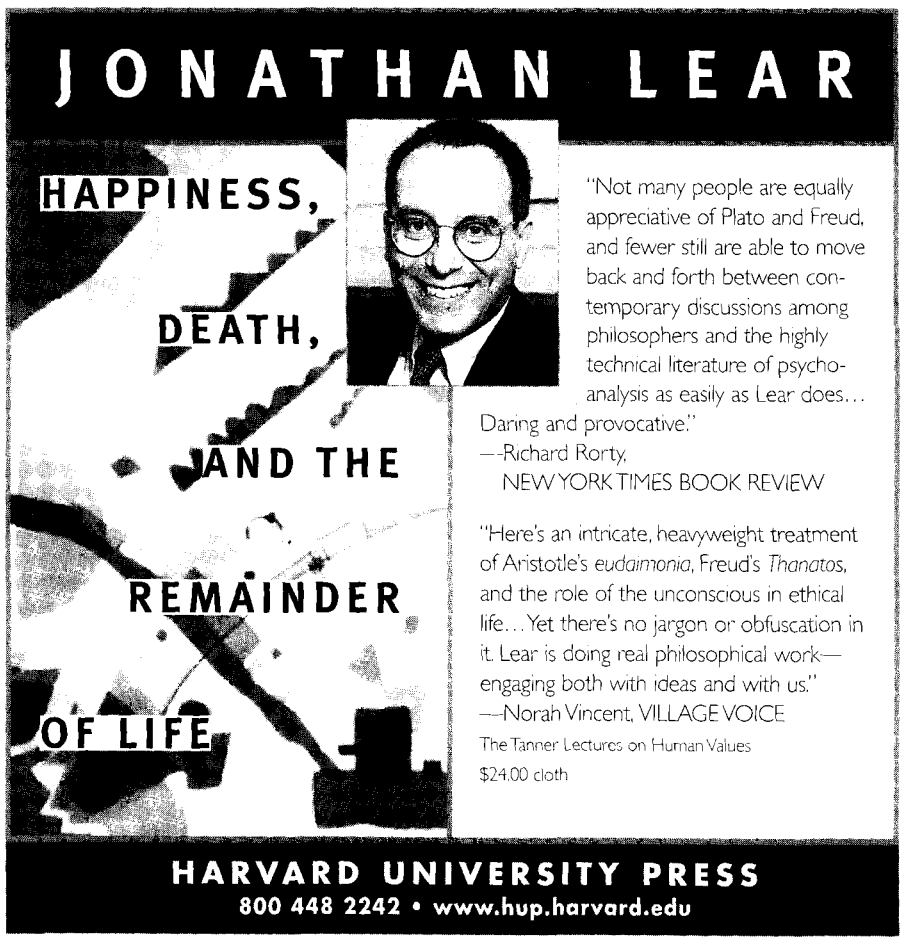
The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies is built upon a close study of the gift practices of Polynesians, Melanesians, and Northwest Coast Indians. Mauss documents the existence of a complex system of exchange driven by the giving of "gifts" that must be reciprocated. A part of the appeal of Mauss's terse and allusive book has to do with its everyday resonances: we have all had the experience of being given a gift, being unable to refuse it, and thereby being obliged to give a gift in turn. We may have been made uncomfortable by a gift, and sometimes we may even have been harmed by it. Like the American Indians described by Mauss (and the Parisians to whom he refers offhandedly), we, too, occasionally engage in competitive gift-giving and entertaining, trying to demonstrate our power and our wealth by conspicuous donation and, sometimes, even destruction.

The Maori concept of the *hau*, the spirit of the thing given, anchors Mauss's argument. Owing to the *hau*, a gift must be reciprocated in order to maintain a kind of cosmic balance. Failure to do so was a spiritual crime deserving even of death. By means of the *hau*, things connected humans in a web that could unite families, villages, and even peoples. From the obligation to give and to receive, and from presents to people, Mauss passed on to charity and to presents to the gods. He was fascinated by the historical connections between archaic societies that could be laid bare by the comparative study of their attitudes to gifts. By "archaic"—and this is crucial for appreciating the nature of Mauss's thought and its relation to the discipline of history—he meant those living in his own time but far away, and also those who lived in the same place but a long time ago.

This desire to go back in time by travelling through space was a discovery of late Renaissance humanists. They wanted to understand what it was like to live or to think like an ancient Roman or an ancient Judaean; and so they investigated the practices of present-day Americans or Africans or Asians. Mauss took this early glimmer of anthropological history a step further. He looked to the islanders of the Pacific in order to discover a chapter of European history whose existence could otherwise not be proved or even glimpsed.

The structure of his book, as is often the case, inverts this important and provocative idea. Mauss begins with the practices of Polynesians and surveys the practices of the Melanesians and then of the Indians of the Pacific Northwest before reaching his Western goal in a chapter called "Survivals of These Principles in Ancient Systems of Law and Ancient Economies." It is here that Mauss suggests that the ethnographical material presented earlier was interesting not merely "as curiosities, or at most for comparison" with the present.

There was a stronger claim to be made. The story that Mauss was telling made it possible "to understand a stage in social evolution." The institutions of gift exchange "provided the transition towards our own forms of law and economy. They can serve to explain historically our own societies." Living Pacific Islanders could be made to illuminate dark corners in the received picture of the evolution of human society. Mauss's leap forward to the parallels of these Pacific practices—though in his view they were not parallels, they were survivals—in Roman, Hindu, German, and Chinese law sets forth the framework for a new narrative of the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origin of modern, commercial society.

> Thus the clan, the tribe, and peoples have learnt how to oppose and to give to one another without sacrificing themselves to one another. This is what tomorrow, in our so-called civilized world, classes and nations and individuals also, must learn.... In this way nations today can make themselves strong and rich, happy and good. Peoples, social classes, families, and individuals will be able to grow rich, and will only be happy when they have learnt to sit down, like the knights [of the Round Table], around the common store of wealth.

Mauss's sense of a world of social interaction and wholeness that disintegrated somewhere along the high road to capitalism is palpable throughout his text; and political sympathies may still explain his book's appeal so many years later. But by far the most interesting aspect of *The Gift* is the way Mauss sought to make a historical argument that gathered its evidence from the field rather than the archive. Mauss saw the Pacific Islanders as the ancient Romans revived. The status of Northwest Coast Indians who failed to reciprocate gifts, he wrote, was "really comparable in nature and function to the Roman *nexum* [debt slavery]." Of the Indians' term for borrowing, Mauss comments that "there is no need to point out the identical nature of this and the Roman expression."

At the end of his survey, Mauss explained that his purpose was "posing questions to historians and ethnographers." It is almost as if he hoped to win converts from among the card-carrying historians to anthropology—which he called "comparative sociology," after Durkheim—by stressing the historical commitments in his own work. "The historians feel and rightly object to the fact that the sociologists are too ready with abstractions and unduly separate the various elements of societies from one another. We must do as they do: observe what is given.... The study of the concrete, which is the study of completeness, is possible, and more captivating, more explanatory still in sociology."

III.

Among anthropologists, Mauss's call for a dialogue with history went unheeded for a long time. Claude Lévi-Strauss's introduction to a volume of Mauss's essays that appeared in 1950 was largely responsible for this oblivion. Only a year after the appearance of his first major work, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss used the platform offered him by Mauss's editors to insist on the superiority of his own approach, which presumed the existence of "unconscious mental structures," to account for parallels and similarities among distant peoples. Mauss's attachment to lived experience occasioned the admonition that this kind of "ethnography would dissolve into a verbose phenomenology, a falsely naive mixture."

Historians have proved to be more attentive listeners. For anthropology has had a decisive influence on the practice of history in the second half of the twentieth century, and especially after 1968. Real people and their beliefs have been recovered by an approach to documentary sources that has focused on the maximum extraction of meaning, in the same way that anthropologists in the field try to pull a vast range of meanings from appearances. The flowering of the French history of mentalities (*mentalités*), the Italian practice of micro-history (*microstoria*), and the German history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) all reflect the power of anthropology in a time that has been suspicious of the relevance of high politics and grand narratives of any sort.

What can historians hope to gain from thinking like anthropologists? A survey of some of the best known of these works offers some clues. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's remarkable recreation of the world of Cathar peasants in the Pyrenees in *Montaillou* treats the inquisitor's record as an ethnographer's notebook. Carlo Ginzburg's recovery and re-creation of the world picture of a sixteenth-century miller from Friuli in *The Cheese and the Worms*, again from the files of the Inquisition, is an intellectual history of a non-intellectual, and so stands in for the myriads who never communicated their thoughts to such ready pens. Peter Burke's many essays, a representative sample of which were collected in *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Europe*, are an explicit attempt to explore the past from this unified perspective.

What historians have learned from anthropology has been, first, to take seriously themes that had not attracted much notice from historians, and, second, to write the history of non-literate people. But anthropology has also helped history by suggesting contexts of interpretation where none seemed apparent. Ginzburg, for example, noted that his miller's creation myth of worms emerging from curdling cheese was not as bizarre as it might seem, since the same story also circulated among the Mongolian Kalmuks; but further than that he would not go. In an extraordinary study of agrarian cults in sixteenth-century Friuli, Ginzburg acknowledged that his evidence suggested the existence of a general European phenomenon, but he resisted simply projecting Friuli onto that broader canvas. He suggested that there are others—folklorists and historians of religion—who might be more comfortable with such general conclusions. He was only a cautious comparatist, "or, to be more precise, I have availed myself of only one of the two comparative methods identified by M. Bloch: the more strictly historical one."

If we wish to understand the relationship between history and anthropology, at least as it appears to the historian's perspective, we ought to turn back to the work of Mauss's younger contemporary Marc Bloch, a great French medievalist, a co-founder of the *Annales*, one of the most important historical journals of the past century, and—a Jew in the Resistance—one of France's most famous twentieth-century martyrs. (He was executed by the Nazis in a field near Lyon in June 1944.) Bloch's historical horizon took in thoughts as well as deeds, the famous few as well as the faceless, voiceless many. Readers of *Feudal Society*, the masterwork of his maturity that was published in 1939, will not forget the astonishing chapter devoted to "Modes of Feeling and Thought." With this inquiry Bloch opened another twentieth-century path back to Burckhardt and the beginnings of modern cultural history—a trail in some ways parallel to the one that was blazed a few years earlier in Leiden by Johan Huizinga, who was himself fascinated by the potential of sociology, as his *Homo Ludens* demonstrates.

For Bloch, Durkheim's sociology provided the inspiration, if not exactly the method, for his historiography; and "comparison" provided the key. Durkheim had gone so far as to define "comparative sociology" as "sociology itself, as long as sociology stops being purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts." His disciple Mauss added, in the introduction to *The Gift*, that "we have followed the method of exact comparison," moving from ethnography to literary history, but only in such cases where there existed "documents and philological studies" that gave access "to the consciousness of the societies themselves."

At the same time that Mauss was using the comparative method to understand gifts, Bloch was using it to understand the healing powers attributed to medieval English and French kings. He confessed that its origins "elude the historian altogether, and only comparative ethnography seems able to cast a certain degree of light upon them." But what was "comparative ethnography," and how did it work? Bloch took the work of James Frazer, the

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pioneering English social anthropologist and the author of *The Golden Bough*, as his example. He discussed Frazer's view of sacred kingship in Polynesia and its possible relevance for understanding the European practice of kings curing by their touch sufferers of scrofula, a condition characterized by a "cheesy degeneration of the lymphatic glands, particularly of the neck" (the so-called "touching for the king's evil"). Bloch called this an "argument from analogy." There was much in such an argument that appealed to him, but also much that counseled caution. "The comparative method is extremely fertile, provided that it is confined to general proportions: it cannot be used to reconstruct details."

THE HISTORIAN, BY implication, was the one for whom the reconstruction of details was the essence; while the comparative ethnographer—in the next sentence Bloch writes of "comparative sociology," using the terms interchangeably like a good Durkheimian—worked on a vast canvas. This distinction was elaborated still further in a famous article in 1928, originally a lecture delivered at the same Institute for Comparative Research in Oslo that sponsored Mauss's work on nations and nationalism. In this essay Bloch spoke of two kinds of comparison, one between societies so widely separated in space and time that no mutual influence or common origin was possible, and the other between those whose histories were so intertwined as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to tell the story of one independently of the other. Bloch himself preferred the solidity of the conclusions that could be drawn from the second sort of comparison.

What, then, could historians hope to gain from the more distant comparisons drawn or implied by ethnographers? Those extended comparisons, he wrote, could help fill in some "gaps in documentation by means of hypotheses based upon analogy." They could also open up new avenues of research. More importantly, comparison helped to remind historians that the past was a foreign country. Centuries of studying and emulating the Greeks and the Romans had made them false friends; but anthropology restored their strangeness, and so it made possible a genuine encounter with the past, and not some sham engagement with a mirror image of the present. As Bloch observed, "we could certainly understand much less well the Roman *gens* or the Greek *genos* if we did not know the Australian or American *clans*."

For Bloch, the most useful service rendered by the comparative ethnographer was to explain the meaning of otherwise inexplicable cultural survivals. "I am thinking here of customs which have survived," he wrote, "and become crystallized after the original psychological environment that gave them birth has disappeared, customs which would seem inexplicably strange if the examination of other similar cases in other civilizations did not make it possible to reconstruct precisely this vanished situation." One catches here an echo of Aby Warburg's contemporaneous project to recover the "historical psychology of expression" that lay behind the survival and the renewal of pagan antiquity.

In an essay called simply "Comparison" that was published two years later, Bloch insisted that whatever the benefits for historians of thinking anthropologically, "it is worth remarking that so extended a comparison suggests more than it explains, or explains fully." Finally it was this distinction between explanation and suggestion upon which Bloch relied to separate the standard of historical proof from that of the comparative human sciences. Distant comparison of the sort that drew on Polynesian customs to make sense of European kingship ritual was lamentably like "interpolating a graph." Bloch also feared that this sort of comparison inevitably proved what it first assumed: "the fundamental unity of the human mind." The historian in him rebelled at the circularity of proving the existence of what had already been presumed. The philosopher in him balked at the assumption that all human beings were alike.

Demonstrating that everyone was the same seemed much less exciting to Bloch than discovering just how much everyone differed. This was the historian's credo. That is why, in his posthumously published statement of belief, Bloch identified the good historian with "the ogre of the legend. Wherever he senses human flesh, he knows that there lies his prey."

IV.

NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS has written that it was her encounter with Bloch's *Feudal Society* that made her want to be a historian. Indeed, her scholarly exploits and her talent for empathy have made her a worthy heir of the founding "ogre." Since anthropology looms so large in *The Gift*, Bloch's discussion of its relationship to history and the historian provides us with the best framework for evaluating its achievement.

The most obviously anthropological feature of Davis's volume is its title and its subject. It is hard not to be struck today by the inevitably nostalgic picture that

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Mauss painted of a traumatic descent from archaic exchanges to modern ones. He has been criticized for presenting this as a linear development. Marshall Sahlins, for example, has offered an alternative: he has described a spectrum of exchange relations that ranged from a "generalized reciprocity" in which gifts were given and no return specified, to a "balanced reciprocity" in which return was expected soon, all the way to "negative reciprocity"—something for nothing. Davis is sympathetic to Sahlins's attempt to overcome Mauss's dichotomy between voluntary return and obligatory return. She dismisses the simple notion that bad money drives out good gifts, insisting that the gift mode and the sale mode coincided. Still, Davis talks about the various ways in which the gift mode was under "pressure" during the sixteenth century, as if suggesting that it was soon to pass away entirely. And, like Mauss, her conclusion focuses on "moral concerns," on the "yearning for plenitude, this intuition of abundant generosity available in the world and in our own selves as givers and receivers." One senses a sympathy that transcends its strictly historical boundaries.

The book is the product of terrific archival sleuthing. Davis has a keen eye for visual evidence, and she is a wonderful storyteller. Inspired by Mauss, she has found her own evidence for the role of gifts in pre-modern France. The power of the well-chosen parallel was the first of the uses of anthropology for historians that Bloch mentioned. The others are also in evidence here: showing real people in action, making clear how much has changed since then, and reminding us that relics of past cultures survive, like dead metaphors, into the present. (Think for a moment about housewarming presents and party favors.)

As much as Davis's book tells us about French men and French women of the sixteenth century, and about her own view of the present, it does not really try to change our view of sixteenth-century French history. An exception is her discussion of the fluid borderline between gifts and bribes in a political system over which French kings were just then struggling to assert their supremacy, with the help of theorists such as Jean Bodin, whom many credit with the modern doctrine of sovereignty, and whom Davis recruits to her argument. But even here there is no effort to convey to the reader that this issue might have had wider resonances in a Europe riven by divisions about power so sharp as to drive nearly every nation into civil war in the hundred years from 1550 to 1650. This gap, and others, may be a function—or a cost—of following Mauss's "tunnel" history too closely.

BUT PERHAPS MAUSS is not required for a serious reflection on the importance of gifts in early modern Europe. Perhaps only the accelerated waning of a classical formation, and with it access to the common culture of pre-twentieth-century Europe, may have made it seem necessary to travel to Melanesia to learn that "what we need is a discussion of gifts and the rules for a practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society." Or that "nothing is more disgraceful than the fact that we do not know how either to give or to receive." Or that "the benefit itself is not something that is counted out and handed over, just as, likewise, the honour that is paid to the gods lies, not in the victims for sacrifice, though they be fat and glitter with gold, but in the upright and holy desire of the worshippers."

Those observations—and many similar ones could be cited—are from the treatise *De beneficiis*, or *On Benefits*, written by the Roman philosopher Seneca in the first century C.E. His tract is a long discussion of the morality and the mechanics of giving and receiving gifts. Seneca was concerned with the social context of giving. Not surprisingly, he also recognized the connection between the giving of benefits and the making of friends: what we might describe as the politics of gift-giving.

Seneca's letters are full of praise for friendship, but they are especially celebratory of the friendship that bound men through the pursuit of common goals. He recognized the tension between friendships that could be made by giving and the friendships that transcended a merely mercantile nature; and so giving and friendship were joined, in Seneca's account, to a third category, that of "constancy." This was the strength of mind that enabled individuals to distinguish between fleeting, superficial good and the rational good that abided. Gifts exchanged between friends bound by reason would not go wrong, nor would they corrupt. In the wider society, of course, this sort of bond could not be hoped for; but even there gifts had to be exchanged if order was to be maintained and violence was to be averted—a minimal objective of politics and political philosophy.

Seneca's ideas circulated continuously across Europe in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, in manuscripts and then in books. The story of how they were put to work would provide a fine example of Bloch's second sort of comparative inquiry, in which a long history of contact and borrowing lets the modern inquirer explain rather than merely suggest. If juxtaposition with the furthest and the strangest is sometimes necessary for a clear look at what we see every day, it is also true that sometimes only everyday contact can develop a fine sensitivity to subtle changes of form and content.

As Davis and others have noted, there was a great deal of interest in Seneca's works in the second half of the sixteenth century. She does not try to explain this fact, though she does link it to the high profile of gift-giving. But if we think about the long history of Seneca's pres-

Summons

Word comes today along the lengths of rain
and through the shiver-spray of hedge-rows.
All my life I've listened, not always for a human voice.
Sometimes I've heard the cool sleep of ferns.

A little seems left out of whatever is or isn't.
Even in my woods I am at best a stir.
Whatever the leaves wish to do with me
I won't be found akilter, nor plaintive.

For trees, shape must be a reward—jut, hoist,
spurn and leap, gape, harden. For trees,
their highest parts mingle. Some thoughts, when had,
must be tracked like a snow-field near dusk.

There are too many empty boats in Japanese paintings.
What does this hold, given the eighteen months
my child has been a presence on the globe?
With precision, the right tone, can a question be an altar?

I feel spoken to some days, and unable to respond.
Mist ennobles all participants no matter the scene.
Yellow, the most medicinal of colors, seems to weep
on behalf of many in the world not near themselves.

Jeff Hardin

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ence in the West, then the marked increase in the editions of his works and the discussion of his ideas must surely be a signal that there is something here that must be explained.

Seneca's vision of the degrees of social solidarity, from the intimate to the impersonal, was articulated in the cynical decades of Nero's reign. (He himself fell victim to the emperor's lack of self-control.) The threats to integrity lay all around: it was a moral and political challenge, rather than an economic one, that elicited the philosopher's discussion of gifts and sociability. Might this help to explain the popularity of *On Benefits* in sixteenth-century France, or in seventeenth-century Italy, or in eighteenth-century England?

Surely Seneca mattered so much in all those places because he spoke to readers who experienced the unhinging of community and the threat to social solidarity at all these levels of personal relations. This was, in the first instance, a consequence of the warfare that racked every part of Europe in the century before 1648. No greater material threat to social life can be imagined than its physical extermination. We know of this fate befalling French communities during the civil wars of religion that marred the last forty years of the sixteenth century—though the wars and the attendant chaos are not mentioned by Davis as having any effect on gift-giving.

ANOTHER POWERFUL THREAT to the traditional order was, of course, the Reformation. Davis's discussion of Protestant and Catholic views on gifts is fascinating. She shows how the interpretation of the mass could turn on an interpretation of the "gift." Catholics thought it possible and proper to give gifts to God, while Protestants believed this to be an inappropriate act of bribery. Calvin's diatribe against any reciprocity between God and man, when seen in this light, takes on a broader social coloration, though it also meant that he had to struggle to find an alternative basis for relations between men.

But Davis, owing perhaps to her fascination with real people, focuses exclusively on men's gifts to God (works) rather than on God's gift to men (salvation). The abstractions of soteriology were far from the concerns of ordinary worshippers. And yet if we want to explore the full ramifications of gifts in Reformation culture, this is an absolutely essential stop: in the seventeenth century both Dutch society and English society were riven by conflict over precisely this issue.

This silence is characteristic of Davis's discussion of the Reformation: assuming its shattering impact, she focuses only on its refraction in the ocean of gift practices. And yet there might have been a greater profit to her emphasis on gifts if she had reversed the direction of the argument and shown how different views about gifts could give us a different view of the Reformation as a whole. There is the faintest suggestion, at the end of her introduction, that the Reformation in France had a decisive impact on the gift register—"Some people tried to rethink the nature of reciprocity, but could they persuade their fellow Christians, and would God listen?"—but by the time we get to her concluding chapter no effort is made to present religion as the keystone of her argument.

A THIRD MOVEMENT that corroded social bonds in the Old Regime was the spread across Europe of the Italian fashion for self-presentation. Beginning in the Renaissance, and immortalized in such popular works as Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier*, which was written sometime around 1516, it spread across the Continent on the backs and in the book bags of aristocratic travellers. The emphasis on style and savoir faire re-made the way in which Europeans thought about "living well," from Scotland to Transylvania.

Far from eliminating gift-giving, this new fashion for being fashionable made giving all the more important. But it did transform completely "the reason for exchange." Some of the most perceptive social thinkers of the seventeenth century recognized in this movement out of Italy a threat to the moral integrity of the old-fashioned lifestyle that Davis anatomizes. The Duke de la Rochefoucauld (1613–1680) in France and the Jesuit Balthasar Gracián (1601–1658) in Spain were the keenest critics of the new social regime that found its first followers among the attendants at court, and that later spread down the fashion food chain to the likes of Molière's Monsieur Jourdain and, eventually, to the eighteenth-century English readers of Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. By then, the cynicism of gift-giving had been exposed by one of the sharpest-eyed and most wicked observers of modern times. Bernard Mandeville even justified the self-interested manipulation of exchange relations on the grounds that out of private immorality some public good could come. "Private vices make public virtues" was his slogan.

This Senecan story, had it been presented to the reader, could have added depth and purpose to the importance that Davis ascribes to gifts in early modern France, and also conveyed some sense of its European dimension. But there is an even bigger prize to be won by following Seneca's early modern trail: a true counter-history of civilization that inverts Mauss's understanding of the gift altogether. For Mandeville's definition of commercial society included the exchange of passions and sentiments as well as goods and services. Three decades later, one of Mandeville's most attentive readers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, located the origin of this competitive manipulation of others' feelings in the earliest beginnings of settled life. But this means that Mauss's Melanesians, already much advanced on Rousseau's "noble savages," were as much the victims of a market—in passions, not in cash—as Mandeville's Londoners. There was simply no difference in the "reason" for exchange among ancients and moderns; no degeneration that was not already present in "primitive" society; no difference, perhaps, between "archaic" and "modern." The evils associated with the market were rooted deep in human psychology, in the fundamental desire to be liked. Small wonder that Mandeville's and Rousseau's enemies were Mauss's teachers.

V.

ETHNOGRAPHERS TRAVEL TO distant, difficult places, and they give us vivid and precise snapshots of a people at a particular time and place. The choice of place is rarely articulated: the reason is usually just that there is where the subjects were. But there is a more fundamental justification for the ethnographer's choices: exemplarity, or the assumption that there is a common human nature—that what they now are, we once were.

Davis has undertaken such a journey and brought back her field notes on how, when, where, and why sixteenth-century Frenchmen gave gifts to one another: "I am asking what were the status, meanings, and uses of gifts in France of the sixteenth century." And why the sixteenth century? We are never really told. Davis writes that "the century of Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre, and Montaigne also had special consequences for gift practices," but every age has its own unique features. Of course the Reformation and the spread of printing are truly epochal, but so, too, is the Hundred Years' War for the medievalist and the advent of the Sun King for the *dix-septièmiste*.

Nor are we anywhere told why France is the best place in which to study the vicissitudes of an archaic gift culture in crisis. This leaves the implicit claim that we study sixteenth-century France in such detail because a great deal of detail exists; and that we make this effort because in this way we can also understand Italy in the fifteenth century, England in the sev-

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enteenth century, Germany in the eighteenth century, and so on—because all peoples are the same, and the close study of one of them can tell us much about all of them.

But historians are not supposed to think this way. They are trained to believe that all people and all peoples are distinct until proven similar. They are also taught that they must be able to explain why their questions should be of interest to others. Solipsism is the specter stalking the true lover of the past. If it can never be entirely overcome, it must at least be wrestled to a draw. Otherwise the historian, like the ethnographer and his subjects, may find himself marooned on his own island in time. ■

Another Genius

By RICHARD HOWARD

Raymond Roussel and the Republic of Dreams by Mark Ford

(Cornell University Press, 312 pp., $35)

MARK FORD IS a British poet and university lecturer in English literature. With great vivacity he has written a declaration of literary fealty disguised, or rather displayed, as a biography of the French writer Raymond Roussel (1877–1933), in order to show that "it is in the uncanny distance Roussel's work establishes between writer and reader that the peculiar, addictive fascination of Roussel resides." Roussel's works were brought to Ford's attention by John Ashbery's pioneering essays of the 1960s on "this most peculiar of writers," as Ford has described Roussel in a review of Ashbery's *Other Traditions* in these pages, adding his own "fervent wish that better times beckon for Raymond Roussel."

As a biography, Ford's book is superb, the aptest initiation into Roussel's life and work in any language (including Roussel's); and to say as much pays Ford a compliment of some scope, for a veritable Roussel industry has latterly developed, not always to the satisfaction of the initial enthusiasts who so frequently preferred to play their mystery-author close to the chest. Ford lists one hundred seventy-seven works in what is only a selected bibliography of books and articles on Roussel, all of which he has consulted, assimilated, and surpassed.

Such interests, and the thousands of pages of scrutiny that record and justify them, are a signally newfangled affair. Back in the 1960s, when I encountered him in Paris, Ashbery convinced me, as he must have persuaded many other literary friends, to seek out Roussel's works, which at the time were virtually innocent of accessible commentary or criticism (except for Jean Ferry's 1953 study, which made so much of the "repulsion or the discouragement of the vulgar"). I was, in those days, eager not to be vulgarly repelled or discouraged, and therefore managed to obtain seven of the ten fat volumes that the wealthy author had paid Librairie Alphonse Lemerre—a very staid French house distinguished by such gilt-edged if not blue-chip authors as Paul Bourget—enormous sums to publish for him.

The books that I acquired were: *La Doublure* (*The Lining*, 1897), *Impressions d'Afrique* (*Impressions of Africa*, 1910), *Locus Solus* (*A Solitary Place*, 1914), *L'Étoile au front* (*The Star on the Forehead*, 1925), *La Poussière de soleils* (*The Dust of Suns*, 1927), *Nouvelles Impressions d'Afrique, suivi de L'Âme de Victor Hugo* (*New Impressions of Africa, followed by The Soul of Victor Hugo*, 1932), and the posthumously published *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 1935). Ashbery had indicated several Left Bank bookshops where these productions might still be found, mint for all their aspect of a certain desuetude, and now they lie heaped before me, the pages subsequently cut and with some pertinacity read, though the desuetude abides.

Fascinated as I am by the overwhelming trajectory that Ford covers or uncovers with such reasonable élan—after dilapidating his immense fortune not only on his publisher and on the theaters that he subsidized to produce his incredible plays, but also on incredible meals served every day by a vast household staff, on a dandiacal wardrobe that he never wore more than fifteen days, and on the sort of globetrotting, accompanied by his mother and by his *maîtresse de convenance* Charlotte Dufrène, that deliberately ignored the strangeness and the variety of the world that he disdained, Roussel committed suicide in Palermo by overdosing on the barbiturates to which he had been addicted for years; his posthumous "confession" *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* acknowledges "the pain I have suffered at seeing my works confront an almost totally hostile incomprehension"—chastened by all this but hardly charmed, I still cannot count myself a *roussellâtre*, nor can I acknowledge the attractions of this writer and his procedures to the slightest degree, unlike the "wide range of writers and artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, Jean Cocteau, André Breton, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Foucault, and Georges Perec, as well as New York writers such as Ashbery and Kenneth Koch," the impressive array that Ford so dauntingly cites.

INDEED, IT IS only for the purposes of reading Ford and reading along with Ford that the seven volumes have (temporarily) descended from "the dustiest and darkest inches my shelves allow," to misquote Edward Arlington Robinson. I would even suggest that the pleasure and the interest, if any, to be taken in Roussel's works have nothing to do with the kind of favor that Ford so fervently seeks for his author: "My ambition ... has been to make Roussel available to English readers: I determined to try to make him appear as a writer who is worth reading, rather than as an engaging exotic or an intriguing case history. I myself find the narrative of his career simultaneously sublime and ludicrous, heart-breaking and bewildering, outrageous in its innocence and logic."

In the last analysis (which is still far to seek), it is my contention that there is an ulterior necessity for this splendid biography, a substantiation beyond anything any "common reader" might find (or fail to find) in the works of a man whose literature, as Cocteau once said, "discourages us from writing." Such necessity must depend on Roussel's nature and on that of his work; and since Roussel is still not a canonical author even in France, I had better invoke Ford's identification of these circumstances by a couple of instances first from the work, then from the life.

Roussel's most exemplary texts were generated by means of a method that

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the writer revealed only posthumously, though suspicions of its existence and its quality had been advanced from several quarters that the author regarded with suspicion indeed: Roussel wanted nothing to do with "experimental" writing, with "progressive" publishing, with "advanced" literature. His favorite, passionately worshipped writers were Jules Verne and Pierre Loti. Of Verne he wrote that he "raised himself to the highest peaks that can be attained by human language," and of Loti that his "name one should not even pronounce except on one's knees."

Here is how Ford describes Roussel's compositional method, or *procédé*: "Roussel would take a common phrase such as *Napoléon premier empereur*, and break it down into a series of homophones: *nappe* (tablecloth) *olé* (the Spanish exclamation) *ombre* (shadow) *miettes* (crumbs) *hampe* (pole) *air* (breeze) *heure* (hour). He would then have to devise an episode that would make use of all the elements that he had garnered. Or he would think of two nouns connected by *à*, such as *revers à marguerite* (a buttonhole with a daisy), and make use of the secondary possible meanings of each noun: *revers*, for instance, can mean "defeat," and *Marguerite* he takes to refer to Goethe's heroine: hence we get a black chieftain in *Impressions d'Afrique* who suffers a military defeat while dressed, for reasons too complicated to explain, as Marguerite from Goethe's *Faust*." After this "explanation," Ford concludes that though Roussel was willing to divulge how he wrote certain of his books according to this elaborately evolved procedure, he drops only oblique hints as to why he developed such singular methods.

As for the writer's life, which affords a spooky and parodic analogy to the biographies of Proust, of Larbaud, of Firbank, and recently of James Merrill—great wealth, an overwhelming and continuously present mother, and (in all but Proust's case) a restless craving to travel, though Roussel had none of the literary abilities of any of them—surely the most marking and remarkable episode is the earliest that Roussel records having to do with literature:

> At the age of 19 I revealed my genius, I was the equal of Dante and Shakespeare.... Whatever I wrote was surrounded by rays of light; I used to close the curtains, for I was afraid that the shining rays emanating from my pen might escape into the outside world through the smallest chink.... But it was in vain that I took such precautions, I was carrying the sun within myself and could do nothing to impede the tremendous light I was radiating [inevitably we think of Whitman's twenty-fifth section of *Song of Myself*: "how quick the sun-rise would kill me,/ If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me"].... I was at the moment in a state of unheard-of bliss.... When *La Doublure* appeared in 1897 its lack of success shattered me. I felt as though I had plummeted to earth from the prodigious heights of glory.... This shock resulted, most crucially, in my developing a dreadful nervous illness, from which I suffered for many years.

COURTESY CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Raymond Roussel in Damascus, 1927

How familiar the structure of this ... delusion! From Freud's famous patient Schroeber to Rilke—from the sublime to the ridiculous (though surely these antithetical concepts, in such cases, no longer apply)—we recognize the phenomenon of such "inspiration," and it is only our evaluation of it that varies. From Nietzsche as from Artaud, from Van Gogh as from Henry Darger, we have learned to withhold our withering diagnostic label of "insanity," and to judge by other criteria the results of the furious energies released by such raptures, and even by their frustrations in "the real world."

What is particularly admirable about this biography is that even while fervently imploring our interest ("better times") in his anomalous author, Ford reveals with an admirable conscience how weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable are all the uses of Roussel's texts themselves to the uninitiated reader. Ford's act of fealty, indeed, is a demonstration of a certain crisis in our contemporary culture's response to art. For even as he identifies Roussel's books as impossible, it is their very impossibility that secures his allegiance (and Ashbery's, and that of all the distinguished others whom Ford has so diligently tabulated). It is true that we are not content to admire power and order and understanding. We must have a distinct measure of chaos and futility and evasion in our "masters" even as we discern such things in ourselves. And if, as Santayana postulated in one of those casual observations of his, to understand oneself is the classic form of consolation and to elude oneself is the romantic form, is it not the modern form of consolation to destroy oneself? ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Presumed Ignorant

I HATE TO SAY "I TOLD YOU SO." Wait, that's not true. Actually, I love it. Some days, the only thing that gets me out of bed in the morning is the prospect of saying "I told you so." Anyway, I've been saying it a lot lately. Before the last few weeks, there weren't many of us who saw George W. Bush as a conservative—except for his fellow conservatives, who knew it all along.

THE IMPRESSION THAT "COMPASSIONate conservatism" represented a fundamental break from Reagan conservatism was formed the moment Bush first floated onto the national scene—and it held, despite a lack of substantive evidence, throughout the campaign. Every conservative position Bush took was interpreted as a concession that he, as a moderate, made to placate suspicious conservatives. When Bush announced his tax cut in December 1999, pundits said he did it to defend his right flank against Steve Forbes but would adopt a more moderate line after he secured the Republican nomination. Then, when Bush failed to moderate his platform during the general election, the pundits decided he still needed to rally his conservative base but would move to the center when he took office.

THAT OBVIOUSLY HAS NOT HAPPENED, and the few brave souls who still cling to this view keep pushing back the timetable by which Bush betrays the right. Frank Bruni, the *New York Times* reporter who has covered Bush since the campaign and who has done more than anyone else to advance the Bush-as-moderate line, made a game attempt several weeks ago to sustain it. Bush's tax cut, wrote Bruni, "is a bid to exorcise family demons, solidify his conservative base and prove his claim that he is a politician who puts principle ahead of polls and popularity." According to this reasoning, Bush, in yet another political sop to placate wary conservatives, is enacting their governing agenda. Someday, though, he will spend the chits he has earned from the right and follow his natural centrist instincts. Perhaps when he builds his presidential library.

IN RECENT WEEKS, I'M PLEASED TO report, the silliness of this view has become apparent to just about everybody. But the recognition of Bush's core conservatism has had a curious effect: It has dispelled questions about his intelligence. If Bush bamboozled much of the public and virtually the entire news media, the thinking goes, how dumb can he be? "A candidate who pulls off what Bush did," wrote columnist E. J. Dionne, one of the few commentators never taken in by Bush's centrist patina, "is no numskull." Michael Kelly recently devoted his *Washington Post* column to reviewing Bush's political triumphs, concluding, "George W. Bush: smart guy. Who knew?" The prevailing image of Bush has flipped, from dumb moderate to wily conservative.

BUT WHY COULDN'T BUSH BE BOTH conservative *and* dumb? (By "dumb," I mean not a lack of innate intelligence but a persistent incuriosity that has kept him in a state of childlike ignorance.) Hoodwinking the national media, after all, doesn't require any special genius. And, even if it did, we have no reason to believe Bush's role in this scheme extended beyond reciting words prepared for him by Mike Gerson and Karen Hughes. And reciting words only requires enough intelligence to understand how to pronounce them correctly, a threshold Bush regularly fails to clear.

BUT, IN A STRANGE WAY, BUSH'S tortured syntax is part of the reason people in Washington now regard him as bright. Bush's critics during the campaign made a big mistake: They claimed his lack of intelligence was manifested in his garbled speech. That's nonsense; plenty of tongue-tied politicians have at least medium-wattage bulbs—for example, Bush's father.

BUT BUSH, UNLIKE HIS FATHER, ALSO has a tendency to use words he doesn't know. His garbled speech obscures this fact, allowing him to pass off as errors of the tongue what are actually errors of the brain. On several occasions he has used the word "resignate" when he means "resonate" or "subscribed" instead of "ascribed." He has said that quotas "vulcanize society" and declared that "I don't have to accept their tenants." This is the sort of error children make when they try to repeat an unfamiliar term they have heard adults use. Many laughs were had at Bush's repeated mispronunciation of "subliminal" as "subliminable." The more interesting, but less noticed, detail was that Bush denied the charge of subliminal messages in his ads on the grounds that "[t]here's one frame out of nine hundred. It is difficult—it's impossible to see it, you know, just if you run it and look at it on TV." (That, of course, is the definition of a subliminal message.) And so the Texas governor was put in the comical position of defending himself against an accusation he didn't understand while desperately attempting to conceal the fact that he didn't understand it. The episode resembled a minor form of playground torment, in which a child is told, "Your epidermis is showing." Not knowing what "epidermis" means but suspecting the worst, the victim invariably reacts with a combination of panic and indignant denial. When reporters leveled the subliminal-advertising charge, Bush didn't know what it meant, only that it must be something bad. And how could his advertisement be subliminable if the offending word only occupied one frame?

A RECENT *WASHINGTON POST* STORY—"BEHIND SCENES, BUSH PLAYED VIGOROUS ROLE"—typifies the latest wave of Bush intelligence revisionism, which has surfaced in the wake of the spy-plane incident. White House aides have put out the word, dutifully repeated by the press, that Bush is actually something of a foreign policy mastermind. But even the administration-supplied details don't quite bear this out. The strongest evidence of Bush's engagement, the *Post* tells us, is that he "determined with aides" to keep Donald Rumsfeld from speaking publicly about the incident—which means, in essence, that Bush's advisers let him take part in the decision. The only other evidence of Bush's Metternichian geopolitical sophistication is that he put "numerous, and detailed" questions to his staff. For instance, the president asked if the detainees had Bibles and inquired: "How's their health?" and "Are they getting any exercise?"—in other words, the sorts of questions a second grader would ask. The more you learn about the inner workings of the Bush team, the more you get the impression of a child surrounded by patronizing adults.

MY FAVORITE BUSH ANECDOTE, COURtesy of *Newsweek*'s little-noticed postelection issue, details what happened when someone accidentally ate Bush's special snack: " 'It's gone?' Bush said, disbelieving and suddenly angry. 'Who ate my peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich?'... Bush returned to his seat to pout." They say that in America anybody can grow up to be president. For some people, the latter can be achieved without the former.

JONATHAN CHAIT

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"Jonathan can now read."

By Cassandra Galloway, shown with son Jonathan

In third grade, my son Jonathan was making A's and B's on his report card, yet when he was tested, he could not read.

My son was on the honor roll, and he could not read.

My husband and I wanted to enroll Jonathan in another school, but we had no real options. Our income is limited. A private school was out of the question.

Parental school choice is widespread — unless you're poor.

But beginning in the fourth grade, Florida's new A+ Opportunity Scholarship Program let us enroll Jonathan at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Pensacola.

Everybody at Sacred Heart knows Jonathan. He feels like he's somebody. He was a very shy child, but now he comes home and he's more outgoing and confident. He is secure of himself. He feels important.

His teacher sends notes home about how he is doing, whether he had a good day or a bad day. If he misses a day of school, the office and the teacher call. I get two calls. His teacher wants to know if he's sick or how he's feeling. I know that they really care about him.

Jonathan likes the way they talk to him at Sacred Heart. "At the public school they were always yelling," he told me.

At the end of fourth grade, Jonathan begged me to attend the year-end ceremony. I took off of work and went to surprise him.

I was the one who was surprised. He got up and sang a song. I could not believe it. He sang in front of the whole school, all by himself.

Since he started attending Sacred Heart, Jonathan gets up in the morning ready to go to school.

Most importantly, Jonathan can now read.

baeo

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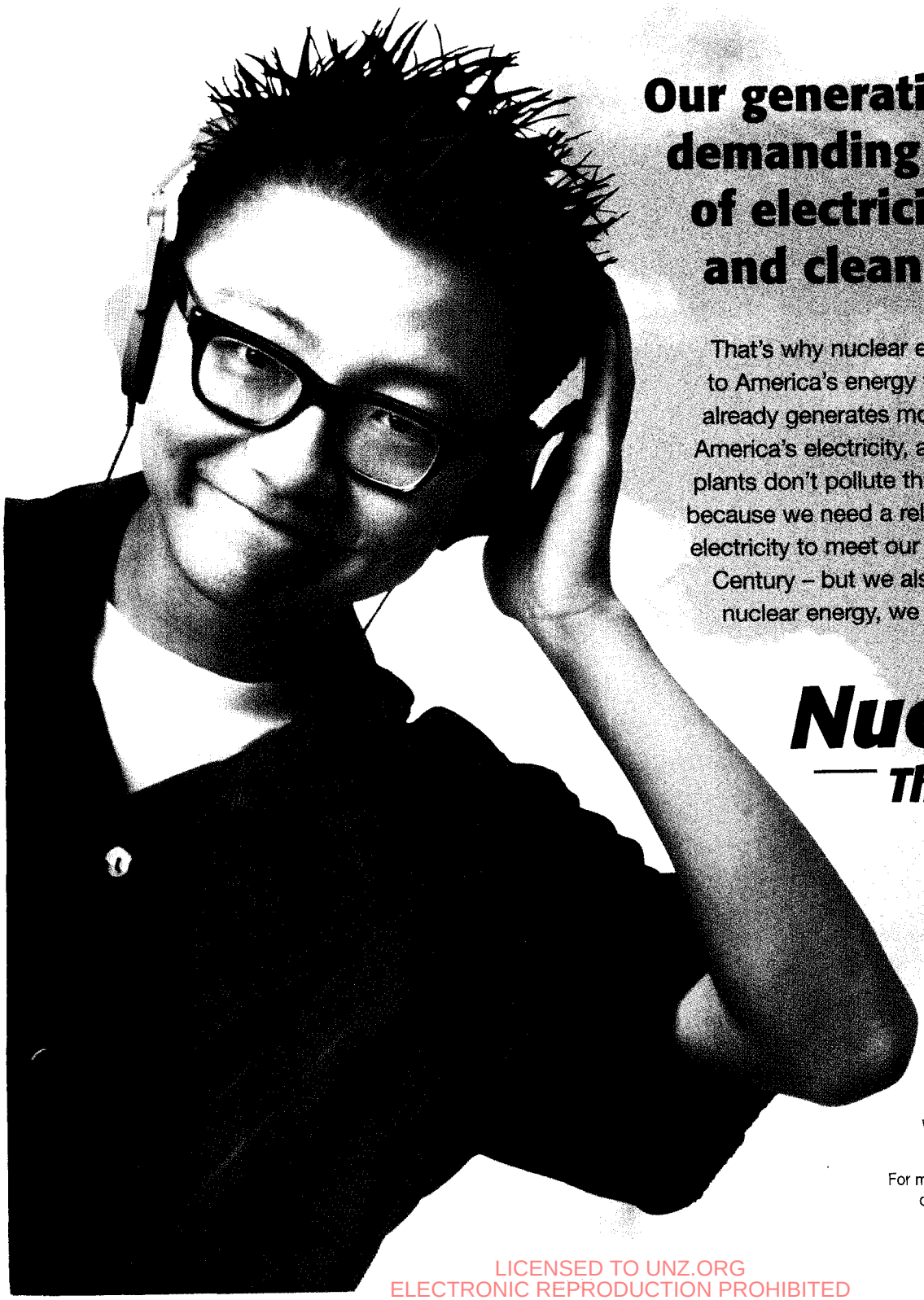

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